



Providing Visits and Services to Visitors		
This instruction applies to :-		Reference :
Prisons		PSI 16/2011
Issue date	Effective Date	Expiry Date
04 October 2021	01 April 2011	N/A
Issued on the authority of	NOMS Agency Board	
For action by	<input type="checkbox"/> NOMS HQ <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Public Sector Prisons <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Contracted Prisons* <input type="checkbox"/> National Probation Service (NPS) <input type="checkbox"/> NOMS Immigration Removal Centres (IRCs) <input type="checkbox"/> Other Providers of Probation and Community Services <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Governors <input type="checkbox"/> Heads of Groups <input type="checkbox"/> NOMS Rehabilitation Contract Services Team <i>* If this box is marked, then in this document the term Governor also applies to Directors of Contracted Prisons</i>	
Instruction type	<i>Delete as appropriate - <b>service specification support</b></i>	
For information	Deputy Directors of Custody	
Provide a summary of the policy aim and the reason for its development / revision	<p><b>Update –October 2021-</b> Amendments have been made to paragraphs 5.13 &amp; 5.15 to clarify when inter-prison visits should be allowed.</p> <p><b>Update – January 2019</b> - Amendments have been made to align with the publication of Strengthening of Family Ties Policy Framework which sets out the policy for the Assisted Prison Visits Scheme.</p> <p>Contact details have also been updated. Following the HMPPS and Ministry of Justice (MoJ) organisational restructure, a new Operational Policy Enquires functional mailbox has been set up in the Deregulation and Operational Policy Team in MoJ.</p> <p><b>Update – April 2016</b> – Amendments have been made to paragraph 3.9 and to Annex G (section entitled ‘What happens during a visit?’) to clarify that prisoners should be permitted to stand at the beginning and end of visits to embrace visitors. This is unless the prisoner is on closed visits or subject to other restrictions. The contact details for the Visits Booking and Conduct Visits Specifications and the PSI details relating to Foreign National Prisoners at paragraph 7.11 have been amended.</p>	

	<p>No other parts of the PSI have been updated.</p> <p><b>Update 02 June 2014</b> – Hyperlinks to KIDS VIP "Children Visiting Prison Good Practice" (2011) have been replaced on in paragraphs 3.20; 4.12 and 8.1</p>
<b>Contact</b>	<p>Operational Policy Team operational_policy1@justice.gov.uk</p>
<b>Associated documents</b>	<p>Conduct Visits Specification Visits Booking Specification Services for Visitors Specification <a href="#">Management of Security at Visits – Open Estate</a> <a href="#">Management of Security at Visits – Closed Estate</a> <a href="#">PSI 37/2010 – Prisoners’ Access to the Media</a> <a href="#">PSI 52/2011 – Immigration, Repatriation and Removal Services</a> <a href="#">PSI 38/2010 Activities in Prisons</a> <a href="#">Strengthening Prisoners Family Ties Policy Framework</a></p>
<p><b>Replaces the following document which is hereby cancelled :-</b> PSO 4410 – Prisoner Communications - Visits PSI 41/2007 – Legal Visits Good Practice Guidance</p>	
<p><b>Audit/monitoring:</b> Those responsible for contract management will monitor compliance with the mandatory actions set out in this PSI.</p>	
<p><b>Notes:</b> <i>All Mandatory Actions throughout this instruction are in italics and must be strictly adhered to.</i></p>	

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## 1. Executive Summary

### Background

- 1.1 This Instruction supports the implementation of the Visits Bundle of specifications, which cover three linked services: Visits Booking, Conduct Visits and Services for Visitors.
- 1.2 Prison Rules require prisons to actively encourage prisoners to maintain outside contacts and meaningful family ties. This is integral to the prisoner's Right to Family Life as well as their rehabilitation. Visits are seen as crucial to sustaining relationships with close relatives, partners and friends, where appropriate, and help prisoners maintain links with the community. The MOJ Resettlement Survey 2008 showed that offenders could be 39% less likely to re-offend if they had received family visits whilst in custody. Regular and good quality contact time between an offending parent and their children/ partner provides an incentive not to re-offend, and helps prisoners arrange accommodation employment/ training on release.
- 1.3 Visits also assist in maintaining good order. Good quality visits in a relaxed environment make a significant contribution to the well being and attitude of prisoners and generally help to build better relationships between families and staff to the point where families are encouraged to share sensitive information which may have an impact on the welfare of the prisoner. *Visitors must be treated courteously and with respect at all times, striking a sensible balance between this requirement and those relating to the maintenance of security, good order and discipline and the prevention of crime. Prison Rules 34 and 73 (1) /YOI Rules 9 and 77 allow the Governor discretion to refuse a social visit or determine the conditions under which it takes places. Such a decision must be necessary for one of the purposes specified in the Rules and should be proportionate to the objective being pursued.* These criteria reflect the requirements of Article 8 of the European Convention on Human Rights.
- 1.4 *The decision to allow any visit must be balanced against the need to maintain security and keep prisoners in lawful custody. The security measures that must be in place as part of the visits specification are set out in the [Management of Security at Visits Closed](#) and [Open Estate](#). Visits must be well managed, monitored, and where necessary due to inappropriate behaviour, terminated to maintain the good order and discipline of the prison. The [Management of Security at Visits Closed](#) and [Open Estate](#) provides instructions on who is allowed to visit, acceptable forms of identification, the supervision and control of visits, visits sanctions (including termination of the visit or the application of a closed visit), and measures to tackle the smuggling of un-authorized items through visits.*
- 1.5 Delivering visits in line with the specifications will also contribute to tackling intergenerational offending, and at the same time deliver on commitments to supporting children and families to help address the poor outcomes faced by them. They include providing a suitable indoor area for visitors, matching delivery of visits to the needs of service users (especially families), and recognising the needs of children.
- 1.6 Together with guidance under each output, this PSI provides additional instructions and guidance ([Annex A](#)) on how to meet all the requirements set out in the Visits Booking, Visits: Conduct Visits; and Services for Visitors specifications.

### Desired Outcome

- 1.7 The **Visits Booking Service** allows social and professional visitors to arrange a time whereby they can meet with a specific prisoner. The service quickly and efficiently matches

the visitor and prisoner to the available visits capacity and in a way which balances convenience and accessibility for the visitor with the need for efficiency and security.

#### Key outcomes for the Service

- Social and professional visitors are able to book a visit
- The visits booking process is accessible and user friendly
- The visits booking process supports and enhances the visits experience
- The visits booking process supports the maintenance of security and public protection

- 1.8 The **Visits: Conduct Visits Service** enables prisoners to maintain contact with friends and family and legal or professional advisers. The service provides a decent and conducive environment for the visit, whilst maintaining the appropriate level of security for the establishment. No member of the public or prisoner should be put at risk as a consequence of a visit to a prisoner.

#### Key outcomes for the Service

- The service supports the maintenance of family ties and outside contacts
- The service is decent and supports and enhances the visits experience
- Social and professional visitors and prisoners are, as a minimum, able to meet in person
- The service supports the maintenance of security, order and public protection including by preventing prisoners from escaping
- All processes support the discharge of Prison's responsibility to safeguarding children

- 1.9 **Services for Visitors:** There is an area at each establishment for visitors to wait in prior to a visit and where provision is made for the secure storage of personal possessions and for the anonymous disposal of illicit items. There is opportunity to receive visits and support information and to provide feedback regarding the visits experience.

#### Key outcomes for the Service

- Visitors to prisoners have a decent, indoor area, in which to sit and wait in prior to a visit
- The service supports and enhances the visits experience
- There is opportunity to receive information on a range of issues
- Personal property, not permitted within the prison can be securely stored and illicit items disposed of

- 1.10 *The delivery of services to the children and families of offenders must be considered in the context of other cross government initiatives around supporting families with multiple needs. This involves a partnership approach to whole family support.* The statutory framework for this, in both England and Wales, is the Children Act 2004, requiring agencies to make arrangements to safeguard and promote the welfare of children. Both Prison Governors and probation providers have important duties under the Act, many of which are associated with either the child's right to contact with parents who are held in custody or with the safeguarding and wellbeing of children with whom they have contact.

- 1.11 While there is no legal requirement for prisons to have a visitors' centre, there is evidence to suggest that a discrete building can be of value when delivering a service to visitors. Not all prisons have a purpose built visitors' centre and at some there is little or no existing

provision. Some prisons are located in city centres and will have access to nearby shops and transport hubs. Others in remote, rural locations have little or no provision nearby, and at others a building is not possible due to location or planning requirements. Delivery of these requirements can be achieved without the need for a purpose built visitor centre as providing the right staff ethos and services can make more of an impact than buildings alone.

- 1.12 Prisons should contact the NOMS Reducing Re-offending Procurement Team (0300 0475953 / 0300 0475933) for advice on procurement of services for visitors. This team is already actively involved in supporting procurement of services.

### **Application**

- 1.13 All staff involved with the visits process or who might otherwise come into contact with visitors. The [Management of Security at Visits Closed](#) and [Open Estate](#) addresses the security issues associated with visits processes.

### **Mandatory Actions**

- 1.14 *Governors must ensure that the booking process, delivery and management of the visits process is undertaken in accordance with this PSI and the Visits Booking, Conduct Visits and Service for Visitors Specifications.*

### **Resource Impact**

- 1.15 This PSI does not introduce any new requirements so the financial impact should be minimal. Commissioners and Governors will recognise that whilst not mandated there may be potential savings in some establishments through adherence to the efficient operating models for these services. Commissioners may choose the quality options for provision of drinks and food for visitors, supervised play and family support worker services are included. There is evidence that enhanced provision to support offenders' family relationships can be associated with reducing re-offending and intergenerational crime.

### **Contacts**

- 1.16 For further information about this PSI please see contacts list on front cover.

(Signed)

**Digby Griffith**  
**Director of National Operational Services**

## 2. VISITS BOOKING

### **SERVICE ELEMENT: Visits Booking**

**Output 1: All Visitors, including Professional Visitors, who are entitled to visit, are able to pre-book visits to enable prisoners to take their visits entitlement.**

- 2.1 *The system for booking visits must be efficient. For example, telephone calls will be answered promptly and the booking will be administered in good time.*
- 2.2 *In public sector prisons, Prison-NOMIS is used to book visits for convicted prisoners.*
- 2.3 A Manager of an appropriate grade – preferably a member of the Senior Management Team - should be responsible for the provision of a booked visits service to ensure continuous improvement of the service. Good practice guidance on visits booking and delivery of legal visits is provided at [Annex D](#) and [Annex F](#).

**Output 2: The booking can be made sufficiently far in advance to permit the visitor to make reasonable plans.**

- 2.4 Convicted prisoners should be encouraged to request and send out visiting orders at the earliest opportunity. Visitors should also be encouraged to book promptly on receipt of the visiting order.

**Output 3: The visits process allows visitors to cancel visits and prisoners to be informed and is sufficiently responsive to permit cancelled visits to be released for re-booking**

- 2.5 Establishments with a large number of unconvicted prisoners may require a more flexible system to enable re-booking of cancelled visits, given the increased likelihood of cancellation at short notice.
- 2.6 All visitors should be informed, when booking, of the need to notify the booking line as soon as possible if they are unable to visit.
- 2.7 Priority for using released sessions should be given to prisoners who want to take reception visits or special visits where an urgent need for contact has been identified.

**Output 4: Establishments are aware of the identity of prisoners and visitors due to participate in a visit and information is shared to ensure a safe and efficient visit.**

- 2.8 Guidance on this output is contained within the [Management of Security at Visits Closed](#) and [Open Estate](#) Policy Frameworks.

**Output 5: The identities of all visitors are recorded and retained.**

- 2.9 Guidance on this output is contained within the [Management of Security at Visits Closed](#) and [Open Estate](#) Policy Frameworks.

**Output 6: The Booking process is user friendly, meets the needs of social and professional visitors.**

- 2.10 *The service to visitors must be of a high standard throughout the booking process, and respond to individual needs, including the method of booking. Visitors should receive a prompt and courteous response. Booking lines should be open at times when visitors are able to call, and staffed according to demand, for example, outside normal working hours and including weekends.*
- 2.11 *It is good practice to staff the booking line(s) with dedicated staff. They should be well informed of the importance of contact between prisoners and their families and they should have a good working relationship with staff who operate the visits service.*
- 2.12 *In order to ease pressure on telephone lines, establishments must consider providing alternative methods for booking visits, such as using functional mailboxes to book by email or more sophisticated call centre arrangements to provide this service across multiple sites.*
- 2.13 *Visitors must be asked to specify special requirements or to request reasonable adjustment that they require to help them access the visit. See paragraph 3.8 for further details. If a reasonable adjustment needs to be made this information must be relayed to visits staff at the earliest opportunity.*

**Output 7: The Booking process is responsive to social and professional visitor feedback.**

- 2.14 *The Senior Manager responsible must monitor and review the service through a formal annual review process, including social and professional visitor feedback. This can be collected using a survey. See [Annex E](#) for an example Visitor Survey.*

**Output 8: The process is responsive to the booking needs of large families**

- 2.15 *Social visits are limited to three adults per prisoner. No such limitation applies to children who are visiting a parent in custody, so every effort should be made to book visits for large families (see also paragraph 3.6). However, booking staff must note the number and age of children who intend to visit and pass this information to Visits staff to ensure they are adequately prepared.*



### 3. Conduct Visits

#### **SERVICE ELEMENT: SOCIAL VISITS**

**Output 1: Convicted prisoners have the opportunity to receive at least two, one-hour social visits in every four week period.**

- 3.1 *Convicted prisoners, both adult and young offenders, must be informed during induction, of their entitlement to social visits. This should include a visit on reception after conviction and at least every two weeks (not two each month) thereafter, including at least one weekend visit every four weeks.*
- 3.2 *Convicted prisoners must also be informed that they can accumulate up to 26 statutory visits during any twelve-month period. These may be taken at their current establishment or they may apply to be temporarily transferred to take them at another prison suitable for their age, security classification and gender. More information on accumulated visits can be found within [Annex A](#).*

**Output 2: Reception Visit – Every prisoner is given the opportunity of receiving a visit within 72 hours of reception upon conviction, where the visit is additional to the statutory entitlement.**

- 3.3 *If a visiting order is required for this purpose a suitable *collection point must be agreed to save time on posting. An agreed collection point system may also be used for visitors with no fixed address.* The visitor would be required to produce approved identification in order to collect the visiting order, and should be informed in advance of the acceptable forms of identification. These should be contained in the establishment's local security strategy. In the case of Category A prisoners, advice should be sought from Directorate of High Security Prisons/Security Policy Group or Police Advisers Section.*

**Output 3: Every un-convicted prisoner is given the opportunity to receive at least three, one hour social visits each week, one of which may be on a weekend.**

- 3.4 *Each unconvicted prisoner must be informed of their visits allowance at the earliest opportunity. Unconvicted prisoners must be allowed visits on at least three days a week, which includes weekends. Each visit must last at least one hour.*

**Output 4: Visiting sessions take place at times which maximise opportunities for prisoners and families to meet.**

- 3.5 *Governors must organise visiting arrangements, taking into consideration the needs of visitors and the regime at the establishment as well as practical constraints such as local public transport. Social visitors (including those who represent the interests of visitors) should be involved in this process, and feedback obtained through a survey. An example can be found at [Annex E](#). Wherever possible other methods of obtaining feedback should also be explored. Arrangements should be reviewed regularly to ensure they are up to date and effective. See also services for visitors section below*

**Output 5: Visits are able to respond to the needs of larger families and special requests received from the booking process.**

- 3.6 *The booking system must be able to deal with requests from larger groups. Up to three adults, together with any accompanying children, should normally be allowed at each visit. A child is defined as any person under the age of 18. Subject to any public protection considerations and to comply with UN Convention on the Rights of the Child and Human*

Rights obligations, establishments need to be as flexible as possible in accommodating large families who wish to visit together especially where the child is visiting a parent.

- 3.7 If fixed seating is in place, freestanding chairs should be made available for additional children. *These must be arranged in such a way as not to impede surveillance of the visit, or general access by prison staff, or jeopardise the welfare of the child.*
- 3.8 *Requests from visitors and prisoners for reasonable adjustments in order to access the visit must be implemented in order to accommodate disabled prisoners or those with particular requirements. At the point of booking visitors must be encouraged to declare any particular requirements due to a disability or an underlying medical condition that would normally require a reasonable adjustment to be made. Staff must consider the needs of visitors with mobility, hearing, speech or sight impairments or any other disability and how the physical visits environment can be adapted to enable the visit to take place.* If the same adjustment has been necessary for the visitor in other situations especially if their needs are complex the visitor should be asked to describe how the adjustment was made. This may help staff apply this to the prison setting. Staff should consult the relevant Equality lead for further advice.

**Output 6: Social visits are conducted in a manner which ensures:**

- **Opportunity for reasonable physical contact. (Though closed visits may under some circumstances be necessary)**
- **Maintenance of security**
- **The safeguarding of Children**
- **Public Protection**

- 3.9 *Social visits must take place within hearing range and sight of staff.* Reasonable physical contact between prisoner and visitors should be permitted, subject to security considerations and any public protection measures that may be in place. Prisoners should be allowed to stand to embrace their visitor at least at the beginning and at the end of the visit, unless they are on closed visits or subject to other restrictions. Young children should be permitted a greater level of contact with their parent or close family member during the course of the visit, again subject to any concerns about risk to the child.
- 3.10 In certain circumstances it may be necessary to impose restrictions on the level of physical contact between the prisoner and their visitor(s). Prison Rule 34(2) and 34(4) set out the circumstances in which restrictions may be considered necessary and the requirement for any such restrictions to be proportionate. The reason for any variation from local policy should be explained to both prisoner and visitor. A notice should be clearly displayed advising prisoners and visitors of any local policy regarding physical contact and the consequences of non-compliance. This should make it explicitly clear that unless a crèche is provided (i.e. where children are cared for in a separate room with no direct and easy access to their family / carer/s and responsibility for the child is formally passed to the crèche), the children remain the responsibility of parent / carer during the visit.
- 3.11 *Closed visits must only be imposed when a risk of smuggling drugs or another behaviour threatening the good order and control of the establishment has been identified.* Guidance on the security aspects of visits including the use of closed visits can be found within [Management of Security at Visits Closed](#) and [Open Estate](#) Policy Frameworks.
- 3.12 Governors of prisons have a duty to make arrangements to ensure that their functions are discharged with regard to the need to safeguard and promote the welfare of children and vulnerable adults. Prison staff and those working in visitors' centres should receive training, briefing or guidance as appropriate in safeguarding and child protection that is proportionate to the likely level of contact with children, in order for them to take appropriate action if concerns are raised during a visit. The establishment - or the service provider -

should arrange specific safeguarding and child protection training - rather than safeguarding awareness training - for Family Support Workers, Play Supervisors and Visitor Centre staff who supervise activities for children. Chapter 4 of *Working Together to Safeguard Children* contains some guidance on the suggested training for different target groups of staff depending on their level and the frequency of contact with children, young people and/or their parents/carers. This is available at <http://www.education.gov.uk/publications/standard/publicationdetail/page1/DCSF-00305-2010> or from Offender Safety Rights and Responsibilities Group. Contact details can be found on the front page of this Instruction.

- 3.13 *Where a prisoner who is assessed as posing a risk to children is allowed a visit from a specific child, staff must refer to Safeguarding Children: Child Contact protocols in Chapter 2 of the Public Protection Manual.* This also contains guidance on observation and seating arrangements.
- 3.14 Prison staff need to be familiar with the procedures and restrictions that may apply to prisoners convicted of, or remanded in custody for, harassment offences, or are subject to a restraining or injunction orders. Detailed guidance is contained within Chapter 6 of the Public Protection Manual.

**Output 7: A strategy for the supervision of visits areas that remains proportionate to the risk assessed, is agreed, documented, and followed**

- 3.15 Guidance on this output is contained within [Management of Security at Visits Closed](#) and [Open Estate](#) Policy Frameworks.

**Output 8: Visitors are able to purchase snacks and hot/cold drinks during the visit.**

- 3.16 The provision of refreshments should take account of visitor feedback. All items should be offered at a reasonable price.
- 3.17 Wherever possible, the refreshments should be available for visitors from an area dedicated to the preparation and serving of food and drink. If this is not possible vending machines can be used on the understanding that the machines are stocked before the visit commences.

**Output 9: There are facilities for children to play whilst visiting a prisoner.**

- 3.18 Opportunities for play can reduce stress, build relationships and parenting skills. The way in which establishments manage the visiting experience can affect whether children wish to visit again, and has an impact on prisoners' ability to maintain positive family relationships.
- 3.19 Play facilities are one way of responding to children's needs and should cater for a range of ages. Public protection and health and safety issues should be taken into account when deciding on location of play facilities. This is because parents and carers are responsible for their children even when they are in a play area, unless it is an Ofsted registered crèche.
- 3.20 Further guidance is provided within the [KIDS VIP "Children Visiting Prison Good Practice" \(2011\)](#) on suggested play equipment which must be easily maintained, clean, meet with Health and Safety requirements, and security requirements. Consideration should be given about how to cater for older children and adolescents.

**Output 10: Visitors can leave the establishment at any time, subject to security checks.**

- 3.21 Visitors should be able to leave the visits area for a short period of time without the need to terminate the visit, as long as it can be managed safely and it does not place unreasonable demands on staff. Visitor re-entry is conditional on the need to consent to another search and on the understanding that the visit will terminate at the original time.
- 3.22 *Arrangements for leaving and returning must take account of the needs of pregnant women, nursing mothers, infant children and visitors with disabilities.*

**Output 11: The décor and general environment, including furniture, is in a good and decent condition; is conducive to creating a positive visit experience for adults and children and supports the maintenance of security and order.**

- 3.23 *The environment must be as relaxed and informal as possible.* The décor and general environment including furniture should be clean, reasonably comfortable and in a good state of repair and arranged to ensure appropriate levels of supervision and access by staff. It is good practice to ask visits staff to identify strengths and weakness in the design of the visits area, from both security and health and safety perspectives. Other considerations include:
- suitability of lighting and ventilation
  - whether it is feasible to have plants
  - location of toys for the children in the visits area.
  - accessibility for disabled prisoners and visitors.
- 3.24 The impact of the visits environment and procedures on children should be considered in order to achieve a welcoming experience.

**Output 12: Visits sessions start on time**

- 3.25 *All visits procedures must contribute to sessions starting on time. Every effort must be made to ensure that both official and social visits start at the advertised or agreed times. Visitors and prisoners should be informed of the reason for any delay.*

**SERVICE ELEMENT: OFFICIAL VISITS****Output 13: Official visits to prisoners are facilitated**

- 3.26 *Visits by the following persons must be treated as official visits and do not require the prisoner to use a visiting order or count against his/her allowance of social visits:*
- a) legal advisers
  - b) offender managers/probation staff
  - c) social workers/Youth Offending Team (YOT) workers
  - d) pastoral visits by authorised and appointed faith leaders / representatives to visit those prisoners registered as belonging to their faith
  - e) Bishops
  - f) Samaritans
  - g) MPs, Welsh Assembly Members or MEPs visiting in an official constituency capacity
  - h) officers of the Parliamentary and Health Service Ombudsman
  - i) representatives of the Prison and Probation Ombudsman, the Legal Ombudsman, the Quality Care Commission, and the Office of the Legal Services Ombudsman
  - j) authorised researchers
  - k) embassy or consular officials
  - l) police officers or other public officials in discharge of their duty

- m) visits from an accredited agent of the Treasury Solicitor, the Director of Public Prosecutions, the Crown Prosecution Service, or the Official Receiver in Bankruptcy, on production of the necessary authority from the department, to interview and to serve documents on a prisoner.
- n) staff of the Criminal Cases Review Commission
- o) representatives of veterans organisations such as the Royal British Legion, the Soldiers Sailors Airmen and Families Association when acting in an official capacity or assisting with resettlement issues
- p) representatives of the Equality and Human Rights Commission (EHRC) visiting in a professional capacity or any other organisation when the purpose of the visit is specifically and solely to discuss equality issues
- q) Immigration Officers or representatives of the United Kingdom Border Agency
- r) visits by other officials or bodies to whom confidential access arrangements applies

3.27 Official status may also be extended to interviews by officers of other investigative bodies such as HM Revenue & Customs, the Security Service, the Serious Fraud Office, the Crown Prosecution Service and equivalent bodies of other countries.

3.28 This is not a definitive list. If a prisoner requests an official visit from an organisation or individual not listed above, Governors may decide the conditions in which it takes place.

**Output 14: Official Visits take place in sight, but out of hearing of any officer/authorised member of staff.**

3.29 Measures are in place to ensure that official visits – particularly those from legal advisers and consular officials – should take place within sight but out of hearing range of staff, other prisoners and their official visitors.

**Output 15: Official Visits shall take place in an area that is conducive to the need of such visits.**

3.30 In determining where an official visit takes place, staff should consider the purpose of that visit and how to meet the prisoner and visitor needs within the existing physical layout. It is not good practice to book legal visits in the main visits area, but if there is no interview room then staff must ensure there is sufficient space between the tables so that conversations cannot be overheard.

### **SERVICE ELEMENT: VISITS SECURITY**

Guidance for outputs 16 -21 is contained in the [Management of Security at Visits Closed](#) and [Open Estate](#) Policy Frameworks.

**Output 16: Prisoners are identified and accounted for prior to the commencement of and at the conclusion of a visit.**

**Output 17: A strategy, including searching, is in place to prevent unauthorised articles entering or leaving the prison during visits**

**Output 18: All visitors are made aware of those articles not permitted to be brought into the prison.**

**Output 19: Visits can be monitored and reviewed during and following a visit.**

**Output 20: The identity and authority of a visitor to enter or leave the prison is established before movement takes place**

**Output 21: There are checks on the approved visitor status, of visitors to Category A prisoners**

**Output 22: Visitors are informed in advance when a booked visit is unable to take place.**

3.31 *When a visit has to be cancelled, visitors must be informed at the earliest opportunity.*

**Output 23: There are facilities for children to participate in supervised play whilst visiting a prisoner.**

3.32 This is an additional service for prisoners which may be commissioned. The aim is to provide high quality play provision for prisoners' children. Opportunities for play can reduce stress, build relationships and parenting skills.

## 4. SERVICES FOR VISITORS

### **SERVICE ELEMENT: NATIONAL MINIMUM: Provision of Visitor's Area**

**Output 1: There are decent, indoor facilities with toilets and baby changing facilities which visitors may access when visiting**

4.1 Visitor centres where they exist, are an essential focal point for offering support to families and can offer signposting to a range of support services, decrease the stress that is associated with visiting a prison and facilitate inter agency working. Providing these minimum services will ensure that the establishment can meet the basic needs of visiting prisoner's families. However, Governors are reminded that the atmosphere created by staff and volunteers can have more of an impact than the quality of the building, and when services for visitors are well managed and provided for families and other agencies are more likely to engage positively. Décor and general environment including furniture in the visitors centre should be clean, reasonably comfortable and in a good state of repair.

**Output 2: Visitors are able to securely store property that is not permitted within the establishment and anonymously surrender illicit articles.**

4.2 *Facilities must be provided for visitors to store any item securely that they are not permitted to take into the prison during their visit.* Very often visitors are put under severe pressure to bring in drugs by the prisoner they are meeting or others. Prisons should consider providing child proof amnesty bins in areas which afford the visitor a degree of privacy but which are accessible to all visitors. Their existence should be clearly identified.

**Output 3: Visitors are able to easily locate the visitor's area.**

4.3 Anything that the prison can do to make things easier for visitors will result in a more positive visit. Signage should be clear and available in different languages, particularly if the establishment does not have an immediately recognisable and visible Visitor's Centre

**Output 4: The visitor's area opening hours meet the needs of visitors travelling to the prison**

4.4 Anything that the prison can do to make things easier for visitors will result in a more positive visit. Information for visitors should be offered on transport links and parking arrangements, and once at the establishment the location of the visitors area should be clearly signposted. Consideration should be given to whether / how visit times take account of the needs of all children, families and young people visiting. Families are under pressure to make visits and logistics and travel time can be difficult. Options for consideration should include longer visits, evening and weekend visits, but visiting times will ultimately need to fit with the establishment regime. Visitors should be consulted about convenient times.

**Output 5: The visitor's area caters for the needs of children and promotes a positive and safe experience.**

4.5 Governors can ensure a safe and positive experience for the children and families of prisoners by: staff from the Gate onwards facilitating a welcoming and positive attitude, being able to provide information and respond to difficulties / queries; providing training for staff who have contact with visitors on the impact of imprisonment; providing training for staff who have contact with children on child protection and safeguarding; searching of children will need to be carried out sensitively ; local procedures and staff training for



safeguarding and child protection are in place; consideration should be given to how information, notices, and posters may be accessible for children: and any toys and play materials provided should be attractive, safe and of good quality.

### **SERVICE ELEMENT: Provision of support and guidance for visitors**

#### **Output 6: Visitors receive understandable basic information on support services for families and signposting to specialist services**

- 4.6 This should include information about the services and organisations already working with the establishment as well as how to access more specialist services. *The information must be in plain English and available in a range of formats and languages which meet the needs of visitors, including those with literacy and sight difficulties.*

#### **Output 7: Accurate information about the Assisted Prison Visits Scheme and establishment visiting arrangements is accessible to visitors.**

- 4.7 The Assisted Prison Visits Scheme exists to provide help with travel expenses for prisoners' close relatives, partners or sole visitors who meet the qualifying rules on income. *Governing governors and Directors must ensure that all relevant staff, seconded offender managers and others who come into contact with visitors are aware of the relevant policy. Where appropriate they must ensure that staff comply with its requirements. See [Strengthening Prisoners Family Ties Policy Framework](#) for further mandatory requirements and guidance relating to the Scheme.*

#### **Output 8: Visitors are able to comment on or complain about the visits experience and receive a response. Comments are used to improve the service.**

- 4.8 This is a feature of a mature service and one which is focussed on improving and delivering the best outcome possible. The following elements should be in place: consultation with children and adult visitors; a facility to collect comments and complaints from visitors which are then handled sensitively without detriment to them or the prisoner they are visiting; monitoring, evaluation and analysis of activities and services provided, their use, and the benefits of services and analysis to determine ways to improve. NOMS is committed to encouraging visitors to tell us about behaviour that is contrary to the equalities policy statement and to investigating the equalities aspects of complaints. Monitoring data on such complaints should be collected and used to inform the management of equalities in the establishment. *Where there is a visitor centre, effective links must be maintained between the centre and the establishment.* An example Visitors Survey is available at [Annex E](#).

### **SERVICE ELEMENT: Provision of Visitor's Area**

#### **Additional options available for commission:**

#### **Output 9: Provision of Visitor's Area: Visitors are able to purchase snacks and hot/cold drinks prior to the visits period.**

- 4.9 These should be of adequate range and reasonably priced. Customer feedback should be used to inform the choices available

#### **Output 10: Provision of Visitor's Area: Visitors are able to purchase a meal and hot/cold drinks prior to the visits period.**



- 4.10 This is particularly important if the establishment is in a remote area and no other amenities offering a range of hot food are available nearby. These should be of adequate range reflective of religious, cultural and dietary needs of visitors and be reasonably priced. Customer feedback should be used to inform the choices available. *All relevant Health & Safety requirements relating to the provision of hot food must be met.* Successful models in existence re-invest additional profits as revenue for, where appropriate, the visitors centre once costs are covered.

**Output 11: Provision of Visitor's Area: Private meetings can be facilitated between visitors and Partner Agencies**

- 4.11 This might include making a room or area available which can, if required, be dedicated for this purpose which affords a degree of privacy. Availability of the service should be publicised. This may also provide opportunities for Offender Managers / Supervisors and other agencies to engage with offender's families.

**Output 12: Provision of Visitor's Area: There are facilities for children to play whilst waiting to visit a prisoner**

- 4.12 Dedicated facilities for children to play whilst waiting build on the minimum requirement to provide a suitable environment for children. Opportunities for play can reduce stress, build relationships and parenting skills. Prisons should aim to provide supervised play facilities. *Further guidance [\(KIDS VIP "Children Visiting Prison Good Practice" \(2011\)\)](#) is provided on suggested play equipment which must be easily maintained, clean, meet with Health and Safety requirements, and security requirements. Consideration should be given about how to cater for older children and adolescents.*

**SERVICE ELEMENT: Provision of support and guidance for visitors**

**Additional options available for commission:**

**Output 13: Provision of support and guidance for visitors: Visitors receive information through a variety of media regarding relevant support services**

- 4.13 This could include enhancing delivery of support and information services through electronic or visual media. Consultation and user feedback should inform the range and type of information available. There should also be a mechanism to feedback any inaccuracies on the HMPS website which user feedback might highlight.

**Output 14: Provision of support and guidance for visitors: A Family Support Worker is available to support families**

- 4.14 Family Support Workers can prove vital in maintaining and strengthening family links and promoting resettlement. The role is designed to respond to the needs of prisoners and their children and families, with the aim of supporting and fostering the maintenance of positive family relationships, supporting families at risk, and championing an integrated approach across criminal justice and children's services to reduce re-offending.

## ADDITIONAL INSTRUCTIONS ON PARTICULAR TYPES OF VISIT

### Official Prison Visiting Scheme

Information about the Official Prison Visiting Scheme can be found at [Annex B](#).

### Deferral of visits – cellular confinement

- 5.1 A Governor may defer the right of a prisoner to a visit until the end of any period of cellular confinement. This should only happen when a prisoner's behaviour is such that removal from cellular confinement for the visit is clearly impracticable or undesirable. Visits may take place in the visiting room or elsewhere at the Governor's discretion.

### Issue and validity of visiting orders

- 5.2 The validity period of the visiting order (VO) is centrally set by Prison NOMIS. Once the visiting order has expired this does not prevent a visiting order from being re-issued should the prisoner request this. Such a request should be agreed from a prisoner who wishes to accumulate any statutory visiting orders and has made a prior application to accumulate his visits entitlement. Expired VOs can be provided to prisoners so they can keep them as proof of their wish to accumulate visits.

### Special visits

- 5.3 In addition to any entitlement to visits Governors may allow special visits:
- to help prisoners make necessary arrangements in respect of unresolved private or business affairs where it has not been possible to do so prior to their reception into custody;
  - for the conduct of legal proceedings or if a visit would be conducive to the welfare of the prisoner or their immediate family.
  - when a family member is seriously ill or to pass on news of a death of a close family member
  - subject to medical advice, to a prisoner who is seriously ill. If a prisoner has a life threatening condition any close family members who are visiting should be given basic written information concerning the arrangements for those visits. This information should address the impact of either a deterioration or an improvement in the patient's condition and how this might affect the current visiting arrangements.

### Final contact visits prior to adoption

- 5.4 Losing a parent due to imprisonment is often an extremely damaging life event for both the child and the prisoner. It can also be distressing to those who are supervising the visit. Establishments should have an agreed protocol for managing final contact visits. To ensure privacy, a suitable time and venue should be made available for the visit such as the family visits room. *The prisoner must be informed of the purpose of the visit before it takes place and helped to suitably prepare for the visit. All staff involved in the arrangements must be aware of the nature of the visit. Staff with whom the prisoner would usually come into contact must also be made aware that the visit is taking place to ensure appropriate levels of support both before and after the visit has taken place.*
- 5.5 *The relevant Social Services must be made aware of the local arrangements for final contact visits as soon as possible. Ideally this should be as soon as the possibility of adoption is being raised. Effective communication between the establishment and the relevant Social Services is crucial to ensuring the good management of the visit. Practice*

guidance on final contact visits for children who are being adopted has been produced for women prisoners by Women and Young Peoples Group but the principles would also apply to male prisoners. Electronic copies of the guidance are available from ERDG on request.

### Accumulated visits

- 5.6 During induction, all prisoners should be made aware of the opportunity to apply for accumulated visits and of the existence of the Assisted Prison Visits Scheme. Accumulated visits may be of particular interest to those whose families are located some distance from the establishment; in other countries or for those families who might be ineligible for financial assistance under the Assisted Prison Visits Scheme. See [Strengthening Prisoners Family Ties Policy Framework](#) for further guidance.
- 5.7 When a prisoner is transferred to another establishment, either permanently or temporarily, permission to take accumulated privilege visits will be at the discretion of the Governor of the receiving establishment. In order to avoid any misunderstanding a written compact should be signed prior to the move, explaining the conditions of the transfer, including whether the prisoner may take only the items of property which are allowed at the receiving establishment.
- 5.8 The Governor of either the home or receiving establishment may postpone or refuse requests for transfers for the purposes of accumulated visits if it is considered that the transfer would give rise to risks to security, safety and order. Accumulated visits may include taking visits in advance provided they do not exceed the number to which the prisoner is entitled during the remainder of the sentence.
- 5.9 A prisoner is eligible to apply for accumulated visits six months after transfer from the local prison to which he/she was sent on conviction, though earlier transfer may be possible in appropriate cases with the consent of the Governor and, in the case of Category A prisoners, of NOMS Headquarters. Prisoners may apply for further accumulated visits every six months, provided they have a minimum of six months to serve.
- 5.10 Local prisons should facilitate, where possible, up to two places for use by prisoners on accumulated visits and should maintain waiting lists for those wishing to transfer.
- 5.11 Prisoners need to make a written request for accumulated visits if:
- they wish to be temporarily transferred to a prison in Scotland, Northern Ireland, the Channels Islands or the Isle of Man. Applications should be passed to the Cross Border Transfer Section within ERDG, 4<sup>th</sup> Floor, Clive House, 70 Petty France London SW1H 9EX
  - they are Category A, or provisional Category A.
- 5.12 Transport for the accumulated visit should be booked on the electronic booking system by the receiving establishment and emailed to Population Management Section. *Booking forms must only be submitted by the accepting establishment when a firm date of transfer has been agreed. The return journey should be booked at the same time. No application for transport will be considered unless both bookings are submitted. The reason for movement must clearly state accumulated visits.*

### Inter- prison visits

- 5.13 Visits may be allowed, if approved by the governors of both establishments, between close relatives when both parties are prisoners at separate establishments.

- 5.14 For visits purposes close relatives are defined as a spouse/partner (including a person - whether of the same or different sex - with whom the prisoner was living as a couple in an established relationship immediately prior to imprisonment) parent, child, brother, sister (including half - or step - brothers and sisters), civil partner, fiancé or fiancée (provided that the Governor is satisfied that a bona fide engagement to marry exists), or a person who has been acting in loco parentis to a prisoner, or a person to whom the prisoner has been in loco parentis. Grandparents and those who have clearly demonstrated the intention to register a civil partnership but have not yet done so may also be included within this definition of close relative for the purposes of social visits. This definition of "close relative" is distinct from the interpretation of a prisoner's "immediate family" which appears in Chapter 2 Section 2 of the Public Protection Manual.
- 5.15 Where a request is made for an inter-prison visit between close relatives, approval should be given unless:
- a. there are reasons to believe that such visits will seriously impede the rehabilitation of either prisoner; **or**
  - b. where it would be compatible with the prisoners' rights to private and family life under Article 8 ECHR and it would be necessary and proportionate on one of the following grounds, that the prisoners should be prevented from visiting:
    - o the interests of national security;
    - o the prevention, detection, investigation or prosecution of crime;
    - o the interests of public safety;
    - o securing or maintaining prison security or good order and discipline in prison;
    - o the protection of health or morals;
    - o the protection of the reputation of others;
    - o maintaining the authority and impartiality of the judiciary; or
    - o the protection of the rights and freedoms of any person;

and in either case the risks identified cannot be adequately managed by monitoring or placing other controls on the visit.

If approved by the governors of both establishments, Population Management Section may be consulted for advice as to the most suitable location for the visit. *Subject to the considerations listed above, and the availability of transport and accommodation, arrangements may be made for inter-prison visits to take place at three-monthly intervals, and each prisoner must surrender one visiting order. Each visit should last as long as local circumstances permit.* Where inter prison visits prove exceptionally difficult to organise Governors should consider the use of video-link facilities as an alternative. The use of video-links for legal matters and official business will continue to take precedence.

### **Children visiting**

- 5.16 The way in which establishments manage the visiting experience can make a difference to whether children wish to visit again.
- 5.17 A child is defined as any young person under the age of 18. The overriding factor in allowing any child to visit is whether contact with the prisoner is in that child's best interests. Bearing in mind the nature of some of the prisoner/visitor relationships especially within the young offender estate, subject to a thorough assessment of risk in which the views of all parties - including those of the parents or guardians of the visitor - are taken into consideration, the Governor has the discretion to allow an unaccompanied visit from any person aged 16 or over.

### **Family visits/events**

- 5.18 *Staff organising these events must follow the guidance in [PSI 38/2010](#) (Activities in Prisons) which sets out acceptable activities for such events.* Family days and child centred extended visits provide a vital opportunity for prisoners, their children and partners to come together to enjoy and share family time in a more normalised environment. They are characterised by more relaxed interaction and fewer restrictions than at regular visits. The focus should be supporting a better quality of experience and interaction for prisoners and their children. Organisation, availability, style of family days, and prisoner eligibility vary across prisons. A good source of further guidance on developing and managing family days is the Kids VIP Family Day Toolkit. Details are available at [www.kidsvip.co.uk](http://www.kidsvip.co.uk).
- 5.19 *A risk assessment must be conducted for any prisoner wishing to take part in special children's visits, or other events which includes children and their carers. A separate assessment must be conducted for prisoners subject to Safeguarding Children: Child Contact procedures.* While it may be appropriate for such a prisoner to have access to particular named children under close supervision it may be unsafe to allow the same prisoner general access to children. *Irrespective of the prisoner's wishes the primary consideration must be whether it is in the child's best interests for the prisoner and/or child to take part in such a visit/event.* Taking into account the resource and security considerations, Governors may wish to canvass prisoners and children as to the format, environment and objectives for such an event. Prison staff may need to modify the programme to ensure that the needs of children with a disability are met.

### **Social visits by former prisoners**

- 5.20 A former prisoner should not be refused permission to visit solely on the grounds that he or she has been in custody, that that person is electronically tagged or that they are under licence in the community. Where such a person is a positive and supportive influence on the prisoner a decision to refuse the visit could be counter-productive. If a decision is made to refuse entry to such a person reasons for that decision should be given. If the person is serving a portion of a custodial sentence under licence in the community the views of their supervising offender manager should be sought. A specific reason for refusing the visit should be given and should not be made solely on the basis that the person wishing to visit is a former prisoner.

### **Visits to unconvicted prisoners by witnesses**

- 5.21 If an unconvicted prisoner wishes to be visited by a relative or friend who is known to be a witness in the case, the visit will not be refused for this reason unless a court has directed in writing that such visits are to be restricted or prohibited altogether. *The Court must establish the nature of any such restriction, to whom it applies and how long the restriction is to remain in force, and should immediately inform the Governor.*

## **CONDUCT OF VISITS**

### **Provision of information**

- 6.1 *Notices giving up-to-date information must be displayed in the visits area.* These should include information covering:
- the Assisted Prison Visits Scheme (see [Strengthening Prisoners Family Ties Policy Framework](#) for further information)
  - visiting times and how social visits may be booked
  - mechanisms by which visitors may pass on their concerns to the establishment about a family member or friend in custody

- guidance for prisoners and visitors on the level of physical contact permitted during the course of the visit
- a statement regarding local protocols for the passing of documents during visits
- a complaints procedure together with a contact point
- policy on searching procedures, the passage of drugs from visitors and the penalties for failure to comply
- a list of the main unauthorised articles and that the conveyance of some of them will constitute an offence under the Offender Management Act 2007
- information on family support organisations, particularly the Offenders' Families Helpline

6.2 Depending on the needs of visitors, Governors should consider whether this information should be provided in several languages or alternative formats. The use of clear pictorial images to convey a message could be particularly effective.

### Stopping of visits and disclosure of contents of conversation

6.3 Stopping a visit should not normally be necessary except where:

- an attempt is made by the visitor to pass an unauthorised article to the prisoner, or vice versa;
- there is a threat of immediate violence towards another person, or another person is incited to an act of violence and urgent action is needed to prevent injury. For this purpose, a verbal threat that is overheard or body language of an overtly aggressive nature are sufficient for an officer to intervene;
- an officer overhears plans being made for escapes, future criminal offences or the obstruction or perversion of the course of justice;
- an incident occurs between the prisoner and his/her visitor which threatens the smooth running and efficient management of the visits session. A verbal warning should normally precede any decision to terminate a visit under this sub-paragraph.

6.4 In certain circumstances information about the contents of a conversation during a visit may be disclosed. This may be appropriate, for example, where such information may relate to the commission of past or future criminal offences, plans to obstruct or pervert the course of justice, threats of violence, etc, and may be of interest to the police or the prosecution. *The member of staff who overhears the conversation must immediately make a record of what he or she has heard.* The information may be disclosed on the authority of the Governor where the content of the conversation may:

- affect national security or public safety;
- assist in the prevention of an escape from an establishment;
- help to prevent or detect crime;
- assist in the recovery of proceeds of crime;
- reveal an intention to self harm; or
- help to prevent or reveal a miscarriage of justice

### Language

6.5 Prisoners may usually speak in the language of their choice at visits. However, a prisoner and their visitor(s) may be required to speak in English if it is considered in the interests of prison or national security, public safety or the prevention or detection of crime. If the prisoner and/or visitor are unable to speak English, the conversation may be listened to by a person who understands the language being used or the conversation may be recorded.

6.6 In the event that close monitoring of any conversation is required and the visit has to be conducted in a foreign language, every effort should be made to secure an interpreter.

## OFFICIAL VISITS

### Consent to official visits

- 7.1 Official visits will be subject to the consent of the prisoner with the exception of:
- visits where the prisoner is detained under immigration powers. The prisoner should be informed beforehand of the reason for the visit but it will be clearly explained to the visitor and the prisoner that the prisoner is free to refuse to make any statement;
  - visits for the sole purpose of the service of legal process such as the serving of summons. Such visits will not attract legal privilege.
  - certain visits by police, immigration or Customs officers

### Legal advisers

- 7.2 Legal visits are subject to Prison Rule 38 (YOI Rule 16) and are for the purpose of:
- discussing ongoing or possible legal proceedings to which the prisoner is a party.
  - discussing other legal business such as the sale of property or making a will.
  - allowing a prisoner to consult their legal adviser about a forthcoming adjudication.
- 7.3 A legal adviser may use a cassette recorder or another sound recording device. *The sound recording device may be digital or mechanical but must not contain either a camera or mobile telephone.* If recording equipment is used a written undertaking will be required from the legal adviser that the recording will be kept securely in their office and will be used solely in connection with the proceedings or legal business discussed during the course of the visit. Letters and documents handed over to or by prisoners during visits from their legal advisers are also subject to whatever monitoring procedures would have been appropriate if they had been sent through the post.

### Police officers

- 7.4 *Interviews with police officers must be conducted, so far as possible, in accordance with the terms of the Police and Criminal Evidence (PACE) Act 1984, and of Code C of the Codes of Practice issued under the Act in relation to the conduct of interviews at police stations.* Interviews will take place within the sight and, where appropriate, within the hearing of a prison officer.
- 7.5 Before the interview commences the prisoner will be advised of the right to consult a legal adviser unless precluded by the terms of PACE, and/or, if there are language barriers, the right to have an interpreter present during the interview. If the prisoner has a visual or hearing impairment and requires assistance in communicating this should be taken into consideration. If the prisoner is under 17 or there are grounds to believe that they may require assistance during the course of the interview an appropriate adult shall be present. A member of staff or one specifically nominated by the prisoner, if no other appropriate adult is available, may undertake such a role.

### Writers, journalists or media representatives

- 7.6 Detailed guidance on the handling of requests for visits by media representatives is in [PSI 2010/37 – Prisoners' Access to the Media](#). If the visit is social, the visitor will be required to give a written undertaking before the visit takes place that any material gained from the prisoner at any time will not be used for publication or broadcast.



### **Priests or ministers**

- 7.7 Prisoners may be allowed pastoral visits from their home minister of religion or leader of their faith with the agreement of the Chaplain and the Governor. A visiting order will not need to be used for such a visit. It may be beneficial for pastoral visits from home clergy to take place in the Chaplaincy area, but this will depend on local circumstances and arrangements, and should be discussed with the co-ordinating Chaplain.

### **Equality and Human Rights Commission (EHRC)**

- 7.8 Prisoners may request visits from representatives of the EHRC. The visit should take place within sight but not within hearing range of a prison officer.

### **Members of Parliament**

- 7.9 Members of Parliament acting in a constituency capacity may visit a prisoner with the prisoner's agreement. Similar provisions may also apply to Members of the European Parliament (MEP) and Members of the Welsh Assembly (AM) who are acting in a constituency capacity. This privilege is not extended to members of the House of Lords, who have no constituency obligations, or to local Councillors.

### **Commonwealth or Consular Officials**

- 7.10 The Vienna Convention on Consular Relations, which has been supplemented by a number of bilateral agreements between the United Kingdom and other countries, guarantees freedom of communication between consular officers and their nationals.
- 7.11 *On induction, foreign national prisoners must be informed of this right to communicate with the appropriate consulate or High Commission.* Consular officers have the right to visit any of their citizens in prison. For the purpose of this Order prisons should accept a prisoner's claim to citizenship. Further guidance about the legal obligations under the Vienna Convention and individual Bi-lateral Consular Agreements in terms of contact with embassies is contained within [PSI 52/2011 Immigration, Repatriation and Removal Services](#).
- 7.12 *Requests for such visits by Commonwealth or Consular Officials must fall under the category of official visits and be arranged as soon as possible. Visits must take place in the sight but out of the hearing of prison staff.*

### **Central or local government officials**

- 7.13 Public officials listed below may visit prisoners, in their professional capacity, without visiting orders and out of hearing of prison staff:
- an accredited agent of the Treasury Solicitor, the Director of Public Prosecutions, the Crown Prosecution Service, or the Official Receiver in Bankruptcy, on production of the necessary authority from the department, to interview and to serve documents on a prisoner
  - Offender Managers, in respect of a prisoner in whom he or she has a professional interest
  - the supervising social worker, of a young offender who, on reception, was subject to a care order, or who will on discharge be placed in the care of a local authority



- an immigration officer, to interview a Commonwealth citizen or a foreign national detained under the Immigration Act 1971
- other public officials whom the Governor permits to visit.

## SERVICES FOR VISITORS

- 8.1 The two reference tools intended to assist with the delivery of the outputs within this specification are:

**["Recognising Quality, An Evaluation Tool for Prison Visitors Centres and Prison-based Families Support Centres \(2007 - updated 2011\)"](#)**

This was produced in partnership between Action for Prisoners Families and Prison Advice & Care Trust and was developed with the Charities Evaluation Service in line with PQASSO, the voluntary sector quality assurance framework. It provides the means to recognise the quality of the most basic services for visitors through to sophisticated family support centre. It provides quality standards designed to identify and help plan improvement, and how to collect information for self assessment and evaluation, including service user involvement and consultation.

**[KIDS VIP "Children Visiting Prison Good Practice" \(2005 – updated 2011\)"](#)**

This guide is to assist prisons in allowing children as much family normality as possible when they visit their imprisoned relatives and aims to give, in a user friendly format:

- the benefits of good visits and maintaining family ties to both prisons and families;
- examples of how some prisons have provided well for children; and
- guidance on how to replicate good practice in prisons and provide quality visits for children.

- 8.2 However it needs to be stressed that this selected content are solely intended to show examples of good practice for guidance purposes and not in any way to define the named organisations as preferred suppliers to NOMS. Other organisations delivering similar services to NOMS also demonstrate good practice.
- 8.3 Purchase of all goods and services, including children and family services should be routed through proper procurement processes to comply with EU, Government, MOJ and NOMS governance. This is the best method of allowing all potential providers equal opportunity and ultimately to get the best value for taxpayers money.

## THE OFFICIAL PRISON VISITING SCHEME

### The role of Official Prison Visitors (OPVs)

1. Official Prison Visitors (OPVs) are independent volunteers appointed by governors to visit and offer friendship to prisoners. They are neither paid civil servants, nor religious volunteers. OPVs are a valuable resource in the efforts to become aware of a prisoner's risk of self-harm. OPVs offer valuable opportunities for prisoners to talk confidentially (albeit with a duty to disclose risk of harm to self or others), and may help prisoners to come to terms with difficult situations. For these reasons consideration may be given to involving OPVs in the local Suicide Prevention Team and in relevant training.
2. Any prisoner may apply for an OPV, whether or not he/she has visits from family members or friends. A prisoner is not required to surrender a visiting order to receive a visit from an OPV. OPVs visit all categories of prisoner, whatever their circumstances and may visit more than one prisoner. The optimum number at any one time is four.
3. Every establishment should have an Official Prison Visiting scheme, unless there are demonstrable reasons why this is not appropriate. OPVs are encouraged to operate in such a way that they are included in the general life of the prison meeting needs which are quite distinct from those met by other volunteers or Chaplains' assistants.

### Appointment of OPVs

4. The appointment of individual OPVs is a matter for the governor at each establishment. The aim should be to have a diverse team of OPVs of varied genders, ages, religious, race and ethnic origins. *When considering an appointment, the Governor must ensure the following eligibility criteria are met:*
  - *all applicants must be of good character;*
  - *applicants must not hold employment or office liable to cause embarrassment or conflict in their relations with the prison, prisoners, or staff;*
  - *members of the Independent Monitoring Board are ineligible for appointment.*
5. There are no age limits, but given the current age profile, applications from people between 18-50 years and from diverse backgrounds should be encouraged. Female visitors may be appointed to male establishments and vice versa. The conditions of the Approved Visitors Scheme apply to any OPV wishing to visit a Category A prisoner. Governors should have regard to security requirements when assessing new applications and in deciding the appropriate point at which an OPV should retire.
6. *An appropriate member of staff, usually the OPV Liaison Officer, must interview each candidate. Two references must be obtained and any other necessary enquiries completed before recommending a candidate as suitable for appointment. The decision to appoint must be taken by either the Governor or a senior manager with delegated responsibility. A suggested letter of appointment is attached at [Annex C](#) and may be reproduced locally.*
7. *All appointment letters must have a copy of the Handbook for OPVs. Copies can be obtained from the NAOPV General Secretary (see paragraph 13). All newly appointed OPVs must be asked to acknowledge receipt. This confirms acceptance of the conditions of appointment and must be retained in the local records.*  
 OPVs are subject to a probationary period of three months. If confirmed, this will technically be renewable on an annual basis although in practice the appointment will

continue until the OPV either resigns or retires, unless there is a reason not to renew or to terminate the appointment.

### The OPV Liaison Officer

8. The Governor should designate a member of staff as OPV Liaison Officer. The duties are as follows:
- publicising and promoting prison visiting within the establishment;
  - ensuring that sufficient OPVs are available within the establishment to provide regular visits to prisoners as required;
  - keeping under review the balance of the team of Visitors, in numbers, interests and backgrounds, appropriate to the needs of the establishment; and advising on possible avenues of recruitment;
  - ensuring that inexperienced OPVs are adequately briefed, advised and supervised during their probationary period;
  - acting as the primary contact between OPVs and the establishment, either as an ongoing source of information or a person with whom OPVs are able to raise matters of local concern;
  - copying letters of appointment for new OPVs to the General Secretary of the NAOPV and the Chairman of the local NAOPV Branch;
  - notifying the NAOPV of any resignations, retirements or deaths in service; and
  - completing an annual return to the NAOPV of the names of all OPVs at that establishment as of 31 March.

### Training for OPVs

9. Like other volunteers, a training needs assessment should be undertaken to identify the training needs as soon as possible after the appointment of the OPV. This should cover mandatory elements, like Security Awareness, and otherwise be focused on the needs of the OPV. The training needs assessment should aim to meet the following objectives:
- to obtain a clear understanding of the essential elements of prison work and how this may impact on the practices of the OPV
  - to understand and contribute to important elements of prison life, for example the promotion of equality and the prevention of suicide and self-harm.
10. A training programme may include the following:-
- health and safety including security awareness
  - suicide and self-harm training
  - equality and diversity training
  - substance abuse
  - breakaway techniques

### Arrangements for Visits

11. It is for the Governor to decide the most appropriate location for visits from OPVs, having regard to the safety of such persons and the good order and control of the establishment. In some establishments OPVs visit prisoners in their cells. Visitors may be issued with keys if the Governor has assessed this as safe. Whilst the needs of the establishment are paramount, the views of the visitor and prisoner may be taken into consideration when deciding the location of visits. *Clear instructions must be given to OPVs and to staff on the times at which visits may take place, and on any special care necessary in the case of particular prisoners.* Although what is said in visits is confidential, OPVs should record the date and time of visits to each prisoner.

## The National Association of Official Prison Visitors (NAOPV)

12. The National Association of Official Prison Visitors (NAOPV) exists to promote, maintain and support Official Prison Visiting. It also helps to encourage and co-ordinate the work of OPVs both at local and national level. It is a matter of personal choice whether an individual visitor joins the Association, but in general, an active local branch will be helpful to both visitors and the liaison officer.
13. The NAOPV General Secretary can be contacted at the National Association of Official Prison Visitors, PO Box 6396, London W1A 2HR or by email/telephone [info@naopv.com](mailto:info@naopv.com) /01274 583417.

## Misconduct

14. Misconduct by an OPV is extremely rare. Liaison Officers should report any incidents of serious misconduct promptly to the Governor, who may initiate an investigation and may exclude an OPV from the establishment, pending the outcome. The local NAOPV Branch Chairman should be informed of progress of any such investigation. If, after enquiries, it is considered that the appointment of the visitor is no longer desirable, the appropriate course in the first instance may be to invite the visitor to resign rather than to terminate the appointment.

## Travelling expenses

15. Officially appointed OPVs may claim reimbursement from the establishment for travelling expenses incurred in respect of journeys between their home address and the establishment (or for the actual journey if a lesser distance is travelled) for each visit. OPVs are expected to use the most economical means of transport available. Where public transport is used, the full cost of standard class travel may be reimbursed.
16. In cases where scheduled public transport is not convenient for the visitor and a private motor vehicle is used instead, consideration may be given to reimbursement at public transport rates. *These expenses are generally limited to journeys of no more than 15 miles either to or from the establishment. In cases where motor mileage allowance is paid the recipient must satisfy the same requirements in respect of insurance as the Civil Service Pay and Conditions of Service Code requires officials to satisfy when mileage allowance is paid for official travel.* In order to aid recruitment in rural areas or to encourage a more diverse membership that reflects the needs of the establishment' Governors have the discretion to relax this mileage restriction.

**OFFICIAL PRISON VISITORS: SUGGESTED LETTER OF APPOINTMENT**

Dear ....

I am writing following your recent interview to offer you an appointment as an Official Prison Visitor (OPV) at this establishment.

The appointment, which is subject in the first instance to the satisfactory completion of a period of three months probation, is renewable annually. In practice, however, your appointment will continue until resignation or retirement unless there is reason not to renew, or to terminate, the appointment. I enclose for your information a copy of the "Handbook for Prison Visitors" which contains advice on prison visiting and sets out in full the conditions of your appointment. I should be grateful if you could acknowledge receipt of this in order to confirm that you accept the conditions of your appointment.

As an OPV you will be under the guidance of (name of OPV Liaison Officer) who is the designated liaison officer for OPVs and will allocate the prisoners you are to visit. He/she will always be ready to assist and help you in your duties.

There are arrangements whereby OPVs may claim the reimbursement of travelling expenses to and from the establishment for each visit, subject to a maximum claim of 15 miles in each direction. Should you wish to claim expenses the liaison officer will be able to advise you on this matter.

The National Association of Official Prison Visitors encourages and promotes the work of OPVs and keeps all OPVs in touch with developments through the issue of a regular newsletter and an Annual General Meeting. The Secretary of the Association is being informed of your appointment and will be writing to you shortly explaining in greater detail the activities and aims of the NAOPV. [There is a local branch of the Association here, as at most establishments, and the Chair is also being informed of your appointment.]

Please let me know whether you wish to accept this appointment and, if so when it will be convenient for you to commence visiting.

cc: General Secretary, NAOPV  
NAOPV Branch Chair

## **Booking Visits - Good Practice Guidelines**

With few exceptions establishments manage the demand for visits by requiring visitors to book in advance, usually by telephone. Visitors and prisoner family support organisations are often critical about visits booking because of the difficulties in getting through to book the visit. Some establishments have improved their service significantly by increasing opening times; training staff to understand visitor needs; and providing email booking. These guidelines are intended to assist managers to improve performance, and prisons should seek feedback from visitors to understand whether they need to make some changes.

### **Opening times**

Particular consideration should be given to the staffing of lines at times that are convenient for visitors, e.g. early morning, lunch, early evening and weekends. Every attempt should be made to ensure that the booking line is available during the published opening hours. You should also use recorded messages when the booking line is closed, giving information on opening hours.

### **Staffing and Performance**

Establishments should aim to deploy the right number and type of staff to this function. Consideration should be given to staffing the booking line(s) with dedicated administrative staff rather than discipline staff, who are less likely to be drawn into performing other tasks around the prison. But you can also use other staff as back up to keep the booking lines open as long as possible.

A Manager of an appropriate grade should be responsible for supervision of the visits booking line. Responsibilities should include monitoring the quality of service, e.g. through regular surveys of visitors and speaking to visitor centre staff about feedback they have had. They should also set local standards, including for answering calls and the general administration of bookings.

### **Setting up and running a visits booking service**

In order for a visits booking service to succeed, it is essential that there is commitment at management level for it to work. This includes examining the business processes and providing adequate resources. An effective way of doing this would be to apply some of the principles of call centre management.

Estimating the number, length and complexity of calls will be important in order to determine the level of staffing, equipment and targets required. The operating model for the Visits Booking specification will be of help when allocating resources.

The average length of calls will vary between establishments, depending on the information required. However, using Prison-NOMIS will help standardise the information to be recorded for new and recurring visitors. Managers should consider whether the line will be solely for booking visits, or whether staff will also answer general enquiries.

Managers should find out how many calls are not getting through on the booking line, to assess whether additional lines are required. Through the CRS process Global Crossing can provide an analysis of this 'latent' call volume. It is likely that such a request will be chargeable.

### **Alternative booking methods**

In order to ease pressure on phone lines, establishments should implement alternative methods for booking visits. These may include:

- offering visitors an opportunity to book their next visit when leaving a current visit
- booking visits by email (using a functional mailbox facility)
- allowing prisoners to book visits for family and friends, either through wing staff or other means
- operating call centre arrangements with other prisons that enables shared resource across a number of sites, but an overall reduction in the number of staff required to book visits
- booking can be facilitated at some visitors' centres. Alternatively establishments should explore with visitors' centre staff ways in which the visitors' centre can further support the booking system. Information about booking systems should be shared, particularly where visitor frustrations with getting through are leading to complaints being made at the visitors' centre. Staff and volunteers could be a helpful resource in explaining the situation and offering suggestions for improvement.

**VISITORS SURVEY****ADMINISTRATION GUIDELINES FOR ESTABLISHMENT****Responsibility:**

- It is each prisons responsibility to administer the Visitors Survey with the seriousness and commitment it requires.
- It is important that the prison takes ownership of the survey and is dedicated to its successful administration.
- Staff responsible for the survey and any other staff involved in its administration should be given satisfactory facility time to ensure its completion.

**Materials Required:**

- Each prison should also provide a large 'post-box' type box in the Visitors Centre. If there is no Visitors Centre facility the post-box should be placed in either the Gatelodge area of the prison or in the Visits Hall.
- The box should be placed in a prominent position, clearly labelled and should be accessible for the duration of the survey period.

**Participant Selection:**

- All Social Visitors that arrive at the prison for a visit during the specified survey period should be given the opportunity to complete the survey
- The offer of a small incentive to visitors to complete the survey should be considered (such as, for example, free refreshments of some kind).

**Explanation for Visitors:**

- It is important that all visitors are provided with a concise account of the rationale for the survey
- It should be emphasised that completion of the questionnaire is entirely voluntary and that they are under no obligation to participate in the survey.
- However, it should also be stated that their opinions are very *valuable* in helping the prison understand the views of visitors and in identifying issues for improvement where possible.
- Visitors need to be reassured as much as possible that the survey is both confidential and anonymous. This is likely to increase response rates. It will not be possible for anyone to be able to identify them from their responses; their names are not required on the survey.
- It should be explained to visitors that once they have completed the survey they should seal it in the envelope provided.
- Visitors may also need to feel confident that neither they, nor the prisoner they are visiting, will suffer any repercussions as a consequence of survey completion and the nature of their responses and comments.
- Visitors should be informed that the results of the survey will be made available to them (in summary form) and publicised within the prison, along with any action(s) the prison plans to take to address any deficiencies highlighted by the survey findings. Visitors need to feel that they are not 'wasting their time' and that their comments are taken seriously and will serve a purpose in identifying areas of concern or need for change. This should also serve to increase the response rate.



**VISITORS' SURVEY**

Your views are important to us.

We would like to invite you to take part in a survey about your visit(s) to this prison.

This survey is completely anonymous. Your name is NOT required at any point on this survey, so you can feel completely comfortable about writing down your answers as fully and honestly as possible.

We genuinely wish to find out about YOUR experience of visiting this prison. We are committed to continually reviewing our visits processes, procedures and treatment of visitors. We welcome any comments, suggestions or feedback you wish to provide.

The survey has 3 parts and should take no longer than 10 minutes to complete.

**PART 1:** Asks for some brief information about you.

**PART 2:** Contains a list of statements for you to respond to.

**PART 3:** Allows space for you to raise questions, make comments or provide feedback to us.

*Once you have completed the survey please seal it in the addressed envelope provided and place it in the 'post box' provided by the prison or return it yourself via normal post outside the prison.*

**Many thanks for your time and cooperation.**

**PART 1: Information about You**

*Please circle the response which best describes you. The data collected from the following questions will never be used to identify individuals. It is used for statistical purposes only; for example, to determine group differences in visiting experiences.*

**1. Is your visit a social or official visit?**

Social

visit (e.g. visiting a family member or friend currently detained here)

Official visit (e.g. a legal advisor visiting a client)

**2. Are you male/female?**

Male

Female

3. **What age are you?**

16 – 18

19 – 25

26 – 35

36 – 45

46 – 55

55+

4. **Have you visited any other prison before?**

Yes

No

5. **How many times have you visited this prison?**

Never

Once

Twice

3 – 5 times

6 – 9 times

10 or more times

6. **Before your first visit here do you feel that you were provided with enough information about visiting?**

Yes

No

If NO what further information would you like to have been provided with?

.....  
.....  
.....

7. **What is your ethnic grouping?**

We would like to ask you to indicate how you describe yourself in terms of your race/ethnicity. This information is particularly important to us as we value difference and diversity and are actively seeking to improve the visiting experience for all individuals.

Choose **one** section from A to E, then tick **one** box to best describe your ethnic group or background

<b>A White</b>	English/Welsh/Scottish/Northern Irish/British	
	Irish	
	Gypsy or Irish Traveller	
	Any other White Background, write in below	

<b>B Mixed/multiple ethnic groups</b>	White and Black Caribbean	
	White and Black African	
	White and Asian	
	Any other Mixed/ multiple ethnic Background, write in below	

<b>C Asian/Asian British</b>	Indian	
	Pakistani	
	Bangladeshi	
	Chinese	
	Any other Asian background, write in below	

<b>D Black/ African/ Caribbean/ Black British</b>	African	
	Caribbean	
	Any other Black/African/Caribbean background, write in below	

<b>E Other ethnic group</b>	Arab	
	Any other ethnic group, write in below	

**If you have never visited this prison before, please complete this survey only after you have experienced the full visiting process i.e. at the end of your visit today.**

**PART 2: Statements about YOUR visiting experience**

Please circle the answer that best describes your experience of visiting this prison.

STATEMENT	FOR EACH STATEMENT, PLEASE PUT A CIRCLE AROUND THE RESPONSE THAT BEST DESCRIBES HOW YOU FEEL					
	Never	Rarely	Sometimes	Often	Always	N/A
1. It is easy to book a visit at this prison						
2. The staff that deal with booking a visit are friendly and helpful						

<b>3. On arrival at this prison the 'booking in' process is quick and efficient</b>	Never	Rarely	Sometimes	Often	Always	N/A
<b>4. The atmosphere in the <u>visitors centre</u> here is relaxed and inviting</b>	Never	Rarely	Sometimes	Often	Always	N/A
<b>5. The <u>visitors' centre</u> here provides good facilities</b>	Never	Rarely	Sometimes	Often	Always	N/A
<b>6. This prison provides good facilities for those visiting with children</b>	Never	Rarely	Sometimes	Often	Always	N/A
<b>7. I feel treated like a 'human being' by prison staff here</b>	Never	Rarely	Sometimes	Often	Always	N/A
<b>8. This prison provides good refreshment facilities for visitors</b>	Never	Rarely	Sometimes	Often	Always	N/A
<b>9. There is too much waiting and queuing involved in getting from the prison gate to the <u>visits hall</u></b>	Never	Rarely	Sometimes	Often	Always	N/A
<b>10. If I am searched, it is carried out by staff with consideration and respect</b>	Never	Rarely	Sometimes	Often	Always	N/A
<b>11. Prison staff here are polite and courteous</b>	Never	Rarely	Sometimes	Often	Always	N/A
<b>12. Visits start on time here</b>	Never	Rarely	Sometimes	Often	Always	N/A
<b>13. The atmosphere in the <u>visits hall</u> here</b>	Never	Rarely	Sometimes	Often	Always	N/A

feels relaxed						
14. The <u>visits hall</u> here has good facilities	Never	Rarely	Sometimes	Often	Always	N/A
15. Staff in the <u>visits hall</u> are respectful of your personal/private space during visits	Never	Rarely	Sometimes	Often	Always	N/A
16. Visits here are conducted in a decent physical environment	Never	Rarely	Sometimes	Often	Always	N/A
17. Prison staff here are friendly and approachable	Never	Rarely	Sometimes	Often	Always	N/A
18. Visits here last for the allocated time	Never	Rarely	Sometimes	Often	Always	N/A
19. Prison staff here are understanding of visitors needs and concerns	Never	Rarely	Sometimes	Often	Always	N/A
20. Prison staff here have acted inappropriately towards me	Never	Rarely	Sometimes	Often	Always	N/A
21. I am provided with the information I need about visits at this prison	Never	Rarely	Sometimes	Often	Always	N/A
22. Visitors are made to feel welcome here	Never	Rarely	Sometimes	Often	Always	N/A

### **PART 3: Further Information**

23. When visiting this prison, do you feel you have ever been treated in an unprofessional manner?

Yes

No

If YES, please describe:

.....  
.....  
.....  
.....  
.....

**24. Have you ever felt discriminated against whilst visiting this prison?**

Yes

No

If YES, please describe:

.....  
.....  
.....  
.....  
.....

**25. Have you ever made a formal complaint regarding visits at this prison?**

Yes

No

If YES, please describe:

.....  
.....  
.....  
.....  
.....

**26. Please write below 3 suggestions for improvements to help us improve YOUR visiting experience:**

1.....





Ministry of  
**JUSTICE**

## **Legal Visits in Prisons: Good Practice Guide**

### SUMMARY

This guidance provides advice on good practice covering:  
user groups, process changes and information for legal visitors

The full guidance document can be found on the Legal Services Commission website:  
[http://www.legalservices.gov.uk/criminal/criminal\\_areas\\_work.asp](http://www.legalservices.gov.uk/criminal/criminal_areas_work.asp)



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## Overview

This guidance is for prison Governors and Directors, as well as defence practitioners. It has been jointly prepared in the Ministry of Justice by the Criminal Legal Aid Strategy Division, National Offender Management Service (NOMS), Her Majesty's Prison Service and Legal Services Commission to encourage good practice for prison legal visits.

Resolving problems with legal visits in prisons to ensure early access to legal advice will result in more remand prisoners entering early guilty pleas and a reduction in court adjournments. Overall benefits for prisons of early guilty pleas will be a reduction in remand population and the prison population as a whole through sentence discounts for defendants who enter early guilty pleas. There are also benefits for defence practitioners of improved facilitation of legal visits in order to see their client at the earliest opportunity.

Although prisons work hard to facilitate legal visits, the growing prison population adds pressure on resources for accommodating these visits. This is further exacerbated by an increase in the complexity of some cases. Consequently, concerns have been raised about visiting arrangements and procedures which vary from prison to prison. The legal profession also has a part to play in ensuring that legal visits are run efficiently, and establishments have raised concerns about practitioners cancelling visits with little or no notice.

Evidence collected from prisons and defence practitioners shows that most problems with legal visits can be resolved by local joint working to understand each others perspectives. The guidance provides advice on good practice covering:

(i) **User groups** – The guidance advises on how prisons and defence practitioners can enter into user group arrangements, learning from best practices emerging in particular prisons. To support these efforts, we will write to key stakeholders in Local Criminal Justice Boards (LCJBs), Crown Court Centre Managers, Prison Service managers, the Law Society and the Bar to promote the guidance and obtain high level support for joint working to resolve problems with legal visits.

(ii) **Process changes** – Some problems, such as inefficiencies of booking systems and cancellation of visits, need a combination of joint working and process changes. This will involve prisons making full use of functional mailboxes (FMBs) for booking legal visits.

This guidance highlights the benefits of adopting such arrangements and sets out the key requirements for dedicated booking systems for legal visits.

(iii) **Information for legal visitors** – Other issues with legal visits can be addressed through prisons providing more information to defence practitioners in the form of leaflets or newsletters.

Difficulties with legal visits

Difficulties experienced by practitioners are:

- Inconsistencies in booking systems – practitioners could make use of an electronic booking system in addition to telephone booking
- Difficulties in getting an appointment with prisoners on short-term remand (i.e. 7 days).

Practitioners have suggested some systems (such as advertising last minute availability on websites) that cannot be provided operationally, but these ideas could be fully discussed at a user group

- Practitioners often have to queue with other visitors, so the time taken to get into the prison reduces time with their client. This can be particularly problematic in high security prisons where visitors are admitted in groups
- Practitioners are not told in advance that prisoners have refused to see them, or are not ready to see them
- Prisoner has been double booked on a social visit
- ID requirements vary from prison to prison and are not explained in advance
- Practitioners not told of prisoner moves in advance of the visit.

### Concerns highlighted by prisons:

Cancellation of legal visits with little or no notice seriously impedes the service that prisons provide to practitioners. Pressures on capacity with high demand for visits can be exacerbated when defence practitioners:

- n cancel pre-booked visits at short notice
- n fail to turn up for a pre-booked visit
- n book multiple slots which they do not actually use
- n bring interpreters to legal visits without giving prior notice to prisons, which causes delay in entry clearance
- n bring laptops without prior notice
- n there is a lack of understanding of operational considerations for arranging visits

### Methods to improve provision of legal visits

In view of prisons' efforts to improve access to legal visits through the use of functional mailboxes and increasing use of video links, there is a greater duty to ensure that legal visits take place and are not forfeited or cancelled at short notice without good reason. This guidance has been sent to defence practitioners by the Legal Services Commission to ensure they are also involved in development of good practice.

#### (i) User groups – joint working at a local level

Governors and Directors should implement user groups at a local level for prisons and defence practitioners to discuss problems with legal visits and find mutually acceptable solutions. These could be arranged using one of the following models:

- Consolidated **use of crown court centre user groups** for discussions between prisons and defence practitioners on legal visits. All Crown Court Centre User Groups have prison and defence practitioner representatives and already include discussions on problems with legal visits. This guidance will be sent to Crown Court Centre Managers and LCJBs to encourage them to formally extend the remit for the User Groups to engage in dialogue to

resolve problems with legal visits at a local level. Governors and Directors should brief their representatives on local court user groups on this guidance, to ensure these forums are used effectively.

- It may be more appropriate for some prisons (for example, due to isolated location or particular types of prisoners) to set up a **specific user group with defence practitioners** dedicated to resolving the problems with legal visits. This has been done successfully at HMP Birmingham, where a user group was established with defence practitioners by communicating directly with the local Law Society and Bar.

In both cases, **User Groups** should have a remit to find solutions at a local level on the following difficulties:

- Increasing capacity – encouraging and promoting use of video links for legal visits, drawing on good practice in a number of prisons; back-to-back visits where defence practitioner has more than one client in the same prison, options for alternative (early morning or evening) visiting slots where possible
- Formulate agreements between the prison and frequently visiting practitioners to minimise time lost to visits through delays in entry clearance
- Find ways to expedite legal visits e.g. for prisoners on short term remand
- Promote new initiatives such as electronic booking systems where available
- Raise concerns about cancelled visits, and contact those firms whose practitioner persistently over books or cancels legal visits at short notice.

## **(ii) Process changes – booking systems**

Prisons are strongly encouraged to set up dedicated telephone booking systems for legal visits, taking account of the following factors in the design of the system:

- there should be a commitment and accountability at management level for the service to be successful
- the need to prioritise and commit adequate resources to the service
- the type of recording system used (i.e. electronic or manual)
- ease of access to booking services for those with disabilities
- an estimation of the likely volume, length and pattern of calls
- time required to make the booking
- opening hours – e.g. stagger legal and social visit to manage queuing
- whether the line should be reserved exclusively for incoming calls and outgoing calls made from another extension
- setting local standards with both realistic targets and incorporating these into staff appraisals where appropriate.

## **Alternative methods of booking**

Prisons should have in place alternative booking services in order to reduce the pressure on the main mode of booking. The legal visits functional mailbox facility ([http://psi.hmprisonservice.gov.uk/PSI\\_2007\\_04\\_visits\\_functional\\_mailboxes.doc](http://psi.hmprisonservice.gov.uk/PSI_2007_04_visits_functional_mailboxes.doc)) was rolled out to public sector prisons in February 2007 to assist with booking legal visits. Some prisons, such as Birmingham, have already used this facility for some time. This has led to immediate improvements with a reduction in the number of complaints from practitioners.

**(iii) Information for legal visitors**

Many establishments produce leaflets or booklets for social visitors, containing detailed information on visiting procedures. Prisons are encouraged to produce an information leaflet for legal practitioners covering the following areas:

- Booking arrangements – covering all relevant systems and procedures. This would be provided to user groups to promote changes in practice, such as booking through functional mailboxes.
- Length and time slots available for legal visits.
- Asking practitioners to identify any particular requirements in advance of the visit. This could be for the benefit of the practitioner or prisoner.
- Arrangements for interpreters and local protocols on bringing electronic equipment such as laptops into the establishment.
- Location and directions on getting to the establishment.
- A list of acceptable identification required from defence practitioners and interpreters.
- Information on searching.
- Cancellation arrangements – this may be a specific contact within the establishment who practitioners may contact in the event of a cancellation. This would also be a good use of functional mailbox facilities.
- Feedback process – including information on the user group.

## Conclusion

Ineffective legal visits create operational difficulties for prisons and delays for clients who are prevented from early access to legal advice. They also cause problems in other parts of the criminal justice system, such as court proceedings. Improvements in legal visits are also linked to LCJB work to improve prisoner availability for court hearings and the increased use of video links.

Cancellation of legal visits with little or no notice seriously impedes the service that prisons are able to offer practitioners. Prisons and defence practitioners should make positive efforts to attend user groups, and prisons should also continue to improve access to legal visits through introducing functional mailboxes and use of video links. Equally, practitioners are under a duty to play their part in working with prisons to find solutions to ensure that legal visits take place, and are not forfeited or cancelled at short notice without good reason.

## Further information

If you have any questions about this guidance or require further advice on user groups please see the contacts below.

### **NOMS**

The Equality, Rights and Decency Group lead on visits policy for public and private prisons. We are keen to assist in highlighting good practice and welcome feedback from prisons on initiatives that have successfully improved the operation of legal visits.

Please contact: **[ERDGPolicyAndRegulation@noms.gsi.gov.uk](mailto:ERDGPolicyAndRegulation@noms.gsi.gov.uk)**

### **Legal Services Commission**

The Criminal Defence Service Policy Team are keen to highlight and promote best practice and welcome feedback from defence practitioners including examples of good practices in relation to the arrangement of legal visits in prisons.

Please contact Sonja Mahoney on [Sonja.mahoney@legalservices.gsi.gov.uk](mailto:Sonja.mahoney@legalservices.gsi.gov.uk) or 020 7783 7431

HMP.....

**INFORMATION FOR VISITORS**

{Insert Date of issue}



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Introduction

**Welcome to HMP [enter name of prison]**

*This leaflet tries to answer some of the questions you may want to ask about visiting HMP..... We hope you will find this helpful.*

*It is important for prisoners to keep in touch with their families and friends. This can help prisoners cope better with being in prison, and make it easier for them to settle back into normal life after they are released. Visiting a prisoner is not always easy. We want to make your visit here as pleasant and helpful as possible.*

*If you would like information that is not included in this leaflet, please contact us on [enter the telephone number], or contact the Visitors' Centre on [telephone no]. We welcome your suggestions for improving visits where possible in this establishment. The procedure for making suggestions and complaints is explained at the end of this leaflet.*

*The main contact points in the prison are:*

- **To book a visit – call:**
- **To report concerns about a prisoner – call:**

**To write to the prison – address your letter to: [insert prison postal address]:**

**[Enter Name]**

**The Governor**

**Travelling directions to the prison**

Trains -

[give details of nearest stations, major routes, frequencies etc]

Buses -

[give details of where from, number of bus, frequency, length of time it takes to get to prison etc]

Taxis –

[give details such as where from, time taken to prison, cost, date when this estimate applied, telephone number of local taxi companies].

Car –

[give details of major routes and time taken, and whether and where in the prison car parking is available].

***[Insert map of prison location in relation to major car routes and stations etc.]***

## Visiting a prison for the first time

If you are visiting a prison for the first time, are unsure about what to expect there is a lot of useful information on our web site ([www.hmprisonservice.gov.uk](http://www.hmprisonservice.gov.uk)). If you would like to talk to someone, advice and support is available from the Offenders' Families Helpline on 0808 808 2003, or [*enter if appropriate*] the Visitors' Centre at the prison [*enter phone number*] or one of the support groups listed at the back of this leaflet.

### How do I book a visit?

You need to arrange your visit with the prison in advance. At least [*number of*] hours notice is required for a pre-booked visit. **If you turn up without having booked your visit you are likely to be turned away.**

To book a visit you need to telephone the booking line on.....[*give booking line number*]. The booking line is open between....[*times*] and .....

This information is also on the Visiting Order. You may also book while you are on a visit [*delete if applicable*].

When you phone you will be asked for the following information [*amend list as appropriate*] :

- Details of the name and prison number of the person you want to visit
- Your own name and address
- The date you want to visit
- The number of the Visiting Order
- The number of people visiting
- The names, ages and address(es) of any visitors under the age of 18 years and their relationship to the prisoner (these details are required under the prison's child protection policy).

If you wish to bring a number of children, it is advisable to talk to the booking staff. Special arrangements may need to be made if seating is limited in the visiting area.

### Other things to tell the booking staff:

- **If you need to take medication to the prison. You could ask about who you should speak to about this when you are booking your visit. Visits staff can therefore be reminded on the day, in order to avoid any unnecessary delays or misunderstandings.**
- Let staff know if you have a disability e.g. if you need wheelchair access or have a hearing difficulty, any other special need, or if there is likely to be a language barrier so that staff can be prepared for your visit.

Wheelchairs, their users, adults accompanying them and assistance dogs may need to be searched. Staff who carry out such searches will do so with sensitivity. Visitors who are likely to need physical assistance during the visit, such as wheelchair users who cannot propel themselves, should be accompanied by another adult. Prison staff cannot always provide personal assistance.

### Help with travel expenses - Assisted Prison Visits Scheme

If you are a close relative or partner or are the only person visiting, you may be able to get help with your travel expenses. Qualifying rules and conditions apply.

Ask at the prison or Visitors' Centre [*delete this if there is no Visitors' Centre*] for an application pack or telephone the Assisted Prison Visits Unit on 0845 300 1423 between 10.15am – 11.45am and 2.15pm to 3.45pm Monday to Friday. Textphone users can call 0845 304 0800. You can also

fax (24 hour service) 0121 626 3474 or write to: Assisted Prison Visits Unit, PO Box 2152, Birmingham B15 1BR. Information in Welsh, some foreign languages, Braille or on audio cassette can be obtained directly from the Assisted Prison Visits Unit.

### Who can visit?

Only visitors named on a Visiting Order will be allowed to enter the prison. (See next section to find out about Visiting Orders). Although you can bring to the visit any number of children who are related to the prisoner, the presence of fixed furniture or other restrictions might make seating arrangements extremely difficult. For this reason, if there are more than three people of any age visiting at the same time, please ensure that you alert prison staff when booking your visit. This is so that arrangements can be made to accommodate them.

Visitors under the age of 18 years **must** be accompanied by an adult. However in exceptional circumstances and with prior agreement, Governors may allow young people between the ages of 16 and 18 years to visit on their own [*delete this sentence as appropriate*].

### What is a Visiting Order (VO)?

A Visiting Order is a form which a **convicted** prisoner must send out to a visitor for him/her to be allowed to make a visit. **Unconvicted** (i.e. remand or unsentenced) prisoners do not need to send out Visiting Orders.

A Visiting Order needs to be sent to you for every visit made. The Visiting Order contains the prisoner's name and number, the number and names/addresses of people visiting him/her and a reference number which may be added when you book the visit. [*add/amend as per establishment*].

**The full names, addresses, dates of birth and their relationship(s) to the prisoner must be given for all children and young people visiting who are under the age of 18 years.**

You will need to have the Visiting Order ready when booking your visit. (See below on how to book a visit).

The visitor will need to bring the Visiting Order with him/her when s/he visits. [*Delete or amend if your procedure varies*].

If a visit is booked and then not taken, it may not be possible to use the Visiting Order for another visit. [*Delete if not applicable*].

### When can I visit?

The days and times available at the prison for you to visit are:

Monday	[enter times]
Tuesday	"
Wednesday	"
Thursday	"
Friday	"
Saturday	"
Sunday	"

(See section on **What is available for children?** for opening times of the children's play area).

If you are going to be late or you are unable to attend a visit please ring the prison on .....[*enter telephone number*].....as soon as you can so that the person you are visiting can be told.

**Please remember** to report to the staff at the prison gate at least...[*enter minutes*].....before your visit is due to start. This is because if you arrive after the visiting session starts you may not be allowed in to the establishment. The latest time you will be allowed inside the gates is .....

### **What happens when I visit?**

[*Please include as much relevant information as possible below*].

You will be asked for **proof of your identity** when you arrive at the prison gates as well as the Visiting Order. If visitors fail to bring identification they will not be allowed in to the prison. The following documents are acceptable forms of identification [*list as per establishment – the following is a sample*] :

- Medical card
- Passport
- Driving licence
- Citizen Card
- Benefit book
- Senior citizen's public transport pass issued by a local authority etc.

You may need to bring identification for any children you bring with you [*delete if not applicable*], including [*list as appropriate, e.g.*]

- Birth certificate
- Proof of age pass
- Passport
- Bus pass
- Student card

Before entering the prison you may encounter a dog which is trained to pick up the scent of drugs. The dog is trained to sit quietly in front of a person on whom drugs may be detected.

### **Searching**

The National Offender Management Service (NOMS) is committed to ensuring the safety and wellbeing of everyone who lives, works in and visits the prison. Searching those who enter the prison is one way of achieving this. The search will be carried out with respect for and courtesy to all individuals.

Searching usually involves a basic 'rub down' search, similar to those undertaken at airports. With permission from the Governor, sometimes more detailed searches may be carried out. Dogs may also be used specifically to pick up the scent of controlled drugs, though a dog indication in itself does not provide proof of smuggling. Closed visits may result as a consequence of such an indication.

If a person, including a visitor, is caught in possession of drugs or other prohibited items, they may be subject to a visiting ban and the police will be called.

Children and babies may also be searched, but this will be done sensitively and only in the presence of their parent or the adult accompanying them.

### **What can I take with me into the prison?**

You are allowed to take the following items only into the prison:

[List as per establishment].....  
 .....

If you wish to bring in property for a prisoner, you need to .....[give the arrangements and any procedures visitors must follow for your establishment]. All items entering the prison will be thoroughly searched and x-rayed in accordance with the prison's security requirements [amend as applicable].

Mobile phones are not allowed inside the prison. Under the Offender Management Act 2007 it is a criminal offence to convey mobile phones or any other component parts in or out of a prison. Lockers are provided where these [and other possessions if applicable] can be kept safely for you during your visit. You will need .....[give value of]....coins to enable you to use a locker, and some money to buy refreshments. [delete/amend as necessary].

Essential items for the care of your baby, such as .....can be taken in to the visits room. [State what baby equipment can be admitted]. However they may need to be left in the care of prison staff.

## Drugs

There is an important role that you can play as a visitor to the prison. We need your help in keeping prisoners and visiting areas drugs free. The smuggling of drugs into prison is a serious criminal offence and will therefore be treated as such. The police may also be called which could lead to an arrest.

**If you are worried about drugs or being placed under pressure to traffic drugs please ask to speak to an appropriate member of staff, if possible before you leave the prison. Alternatively phone the prison [insert local telephone number where a designated local drugs Helpline is in operation]**

## What happens during a visit?

The prisoner and his/her visitor(s) normally sit across a table in an open room, with other prisoners and visitors present. Physical contact between the prisoner and his/her visitor(s) is usually allowed at the beginning and end of the visit, unless the prisoner is subject to other restrictions. For this contact, the person you are visiting is normally allowed to stand but, otherwise, they will normally have to stay seated throughout.

If you leave the room for any reason such as to use the toilet, you will probably be searched again before you re-enter the visits room.

Prison staff will be present in the visiting area to make sure the session runs smoothly, and that the visits area is safe and comfortable for visitors and prisoners.

You can buy tea, coffee, cold drinks and snacks [amend as appropriate] for you and the person you are visiting.

A visit may be held under 'closed' conditions if there are concerns that you and/or the prisoner may be a risk to prison security, or if there is a risk that unacceptable or illegal activity might take place during the visit such as passing drugs. During a closed visit the prisoner and his/her visitor talk to each other while seated either side of a glass panel.

## What is available for children?

[Delete or amend as per establishment]

There is a play area for visitors' children to enjoy in the visiting area where there are toys, and a volunteer(s) [or staff member(s) - state as applicable] is there to help supervise children. However you are responsible for the children you bring to the visit and you must be able to see them even when they are playing. [delete and insert relevant paragraph if Ofsted registered crèche available]

The play area is open during the following days and times:

[list as appropriate]

.....  
.....

All visitors under the age of 18 years are regarded as children, and must visit with an adult. This is a requirement of the prison's child protection policy. They must not be left on their own anywhere or at any time on the prison premises, including in the Visitors' Centre or car park.

**What to do if you are worried about a relative or friend in prison**

If you have concerns about a prisoner's safety or wellbeing, for instance -

- if you think they might harm themselves
- they are at risk from other people in the prison
- they are suffering racist or other abuse

ask to speak to the Suicide Prevention Co-ordinator [insert applicable role] (in the case of self-harm) or the duty governor, if possible before you leave the prison, or contact the manager of the Visitors' Centre [delete if you do not have one]. The information will then be passed on to the right person who will deal with it as soon as possible. If you are unable to contact anyone at the prison, contact the Offenders' Families Helpline on 0808 808 2003.

[Include if appropriate]

There is a free Anti-Bullying Helpline at the prison which you may phone in confidence. The number is..... .

**How can I make a complaint?**

If you are unhappy about our visiting arrangements, or have any suggestions about how they might be improved, please contact ..... [enter the name, telephone and full address of contact] ..... or fill in a comments slip, which is available in the visits hall/visitors' centre [modify according to local procedures].

You can write instead, about visits or any other prison matter, to the prison Governor, the Chair of the Independent Monitoring Board (which is not part of the management of the prison), your own MP or the MP in the constituency that the prison is in. Complaints can also be made to the Prisons and Probation Ombudsman, which is an independent body, but this has to be done through the prisoner you are visiting.

NOMS is committed to fairness for all. We treat our staff properly and ensure equality of opportunity. We deliver our services fairly and respond to individual needs. We insist on respectful and decent behaviour from staff, offenders and others with whom we work. We recognise that discrimination, harassment and bullying can nevertheless occur and we take prompt and appropriate action whenever we discover them.

We encourage visitors to tell us about behaviour that is contrary to our commitment to fairness and decency, and we are committed to investigating the equalities aspects of complaints.

**Where can I get help outside the prison?**



The following organisations work with prisoners and their families. They are not part of NOMS.

### **Action for Prisoners' Families**

The umbrella organisation supporting the development of services for prisoners' and offenders' families. Produces resource material for families, a newsletter and works on national policy issues affecting families. APF can also link families to our members who provide local support across the country.

Address: 21 Carlson Court, 116 Putney Bridge Road, London SW15 2NQ

Website: [www.prisonersfamilies.org.uk](http://www.prisonersfamilies.org.uk)

Contact 020 8812 3600

info@prisonersfamilies.org.uk

### **Offenders' Families Helpline**

This is the national freephone helpline offering information and support to anyone with a relative or friend in prison.

Tel: 0808 808 2003

Website: [www.prisonersfamilieshelpline.org.uk](http://www.prisonersfamilieshelpline.org.uk)

E-mail: [info@prisonersfamilieshelpline.org.uk](mailto:info@prisonersfamilieshelpline.org.uk)

### **Adfam**

Adfam exists to raise awareness of, and take action to alleviate, family problems relating to drugs and alcohol.

Address: 25 Corsham Street, London, N1 6DR

Tel: 020 7553 7640

Web site: [www.adfam.org.uk](http://www.adfam.org.uk)

Email: [admin@adfam.org.uk](mailto:admin@adfam.org.uk)

### **Crimestoppers**

Crimestoppers enables anyone with information about crime or criminal activities, and who wishes to remain anonymous, to call a single nationwide freephone number. Callers will not be asked their name or other personal details and the call will not be recorded or traced. If the information leads to an arrest and charge, the caller may qualify for a cash reward (up to £500) which is paid without compromising the anonymity of the caller. The Crimestoppers Trust, a registered charity, is a partnership between the community, business and the media to assist in the detection of crime.

Telephone no: 0800 555 111

### **Prison Fellowship of England and Wales**

Offers support to prisoners, families and ex-offenders. The organisation is volunteer based with a Christian ethos, offering services to anyone who asks them regardless of belief.

Address: PO Box 945, Malden, Essex CM9 4EW

Tel: 01621 843232

Web site: [www.prisonfellowship.org.uk](http://www.prisonfellowship.org.uk)

Email: [enquiries@prisonfellowship.org.uk](mailto:enquiries@prisonfellowship.org.uk)

**Prison Reform Trust**

This is a national charity that campaigns for better conditions in prison and the greater use of alternatives to custody. They have an advice service and can provide information on various aspects of imprisonment.

**Address:** Second Floor, The Old Trading House, 15 Northburgh Street, London, EC1V 0JR

**Tel:** 020 7251 5070

**Website:** [www.prisonreformtrust.org.uk](http://www.prisonreformtrust.org.uk)

**email:** [prt@prisonreformtrust.co.uk](mailto:prt@prisonreformtrust.co.uk)

*(enter other local or national support organisations should you wish)*