



HM Courts &
Tribunals Service



Vulnerability Action Plan

April 2023 update

How we are going to make coming to court or
a tribunal better for vulnerable people



EasyRead version



HM Courts &
Tribunals Service

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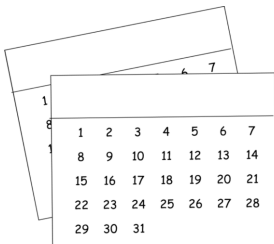
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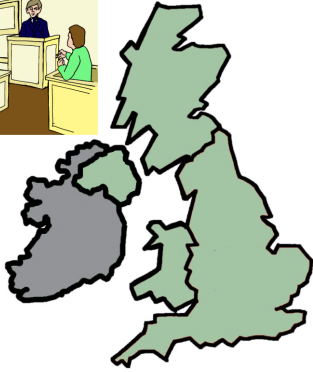
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About HMCTS

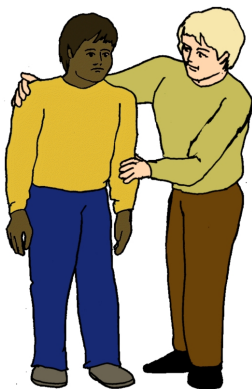


HMCTS stands for His Majesty's Courts and Tribunals Service.

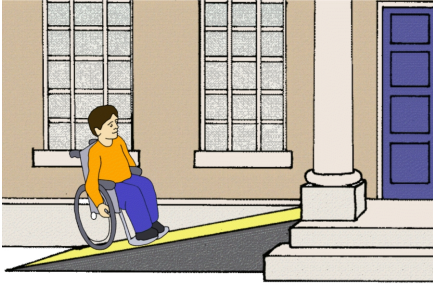
We run courts in England and Wales and tribunals in England, Wales, Scotland and Northern Ireland to give people and businesses access to justice.



We know that coming to court can feel scary for **vulnerable people**.



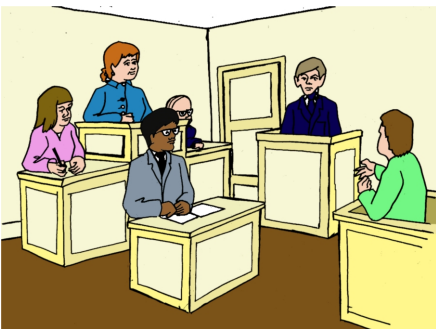
We say people are **vulnerable** when they have a difficulty and need extra support. This could be a disability, mental health condition or an experience which has made someone feel unsafe.



We want our courts and tribunals to be **accessible** and feel safe for vulnerable people.



When something is **accessible** everyone can use it.

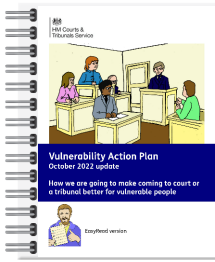


Our **Vulnerability Action Plan** tells you how we will make coming to courts and tribunals better for vulnerable people.



We promise to listen to vulnerable people and the services that help vulnerable people so we can give you help when you need it.

October 2022						
Mon	Tue	Wed	Thu	Fri	Sat	Sun
31					1	2
3	4	5	6	7	8	
10	11	12	13	14	15	
17	18	19	20	21	22	
24	25	26	27	28	29	



We last told you about our plan in October 2022. This is our April 2023 news.

We will keep our Vulnerability Action Plan up to date by:



- talking with vulnerable people and services that help them



- looking at new laws that the government makes to see how they affect vulnerable people



- looking at government plans such as national disability strategy.



- looking at new government plans such as the National Strategy for Autistic Children, Young People, and Adults, and the Ministry of Justice Neurodiversity Action Plan.

Our priority areas



There are three important things we said we will do. We call them our three **priority areas**.



Priority 1: giving the right support to vulnerable people using the court and tribunal services.

This support includes **signposting** or telling them about other places to get information and help.



Priority 2: collecting information about how what we are doing affects our vulnerable users. This information is called evidence.



Priority 3: making services accessible for vulnerable users.

When something is accessible everyone can use it.

What we have already done in our three priority areas since October 2022



Priority 1: giving the right support to vulnerable people using the court and tribunal services.

This support includes **signposting** or telling people where they can get information and help.



- We started the Video Hearings Service in a some of our buildings.

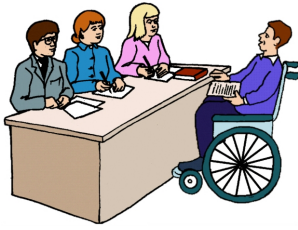


- We put our new **Safeguarding policy** on the internet.

A **policy** is a set of rules.

Safeguarding is protecting the rights of adults at risk and children. This helps them live in safety, free from abuse and neglect.

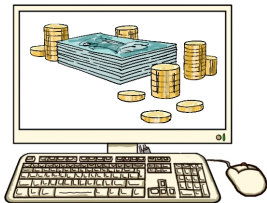
- We worked with We Are Digital to set up a national digital support service to help vulnerable people with online court matters such as:



- **Social Security and Child Support Tribunal**



- **Single Justice Service**



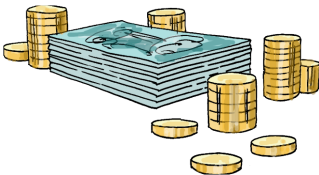
- **making a civil money claim online**



- **probate**



- **divorce**



- **help with fees to use our online service.**



The digital support service will help people who do not have the technology or skills to do things online.



- We set up the **Unwanted Prisoner Contact Service** which used to be called the National Victim's Helpline.

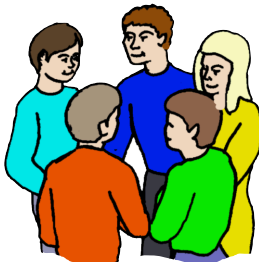


The **Unwanted Prisoner Contact Service** helps:

- Police forces



- His Majesty's Prison and Probation Service (HMPPS)



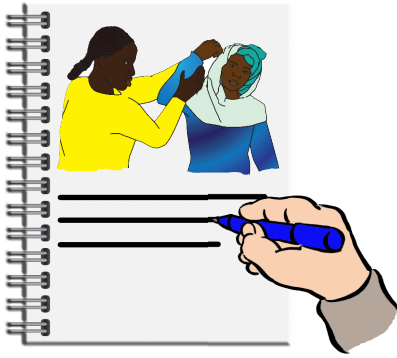
- charities and voluntary groups



- members of the public, including victims of domestic abuse



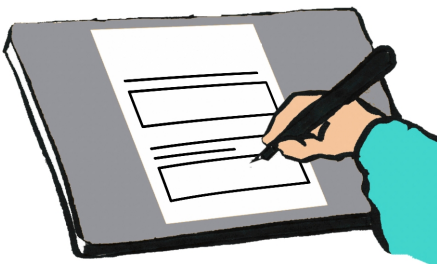
- to stop unwanted crime.



- We wrote information about how our staff can help people at risk of harm or suicide.



- We made it easier to start an Employment Tribunal case online.

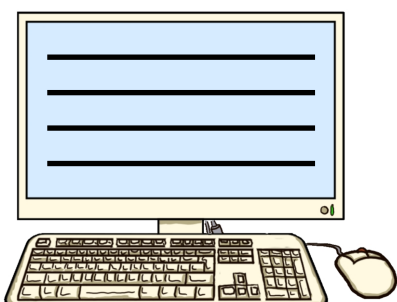


People can still use paper forms.

- If you need to use the family court, you can go on the internet to:



- change your contact details
- answer questions about your court orders



- look at other documents added to your case
- be signposted to useful information
- track how your case is going.

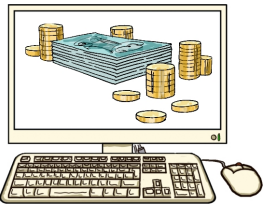


Priority 2: collecting information about how what we are doing affects our vulnerable users. This information is called evidence.

- We looked at how vulnerable people get access to justice when using:



- Social Security and Child Support services



- making a Civil Money Claim on the internet



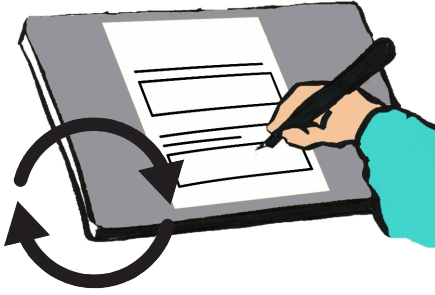
- making an application for a divorce



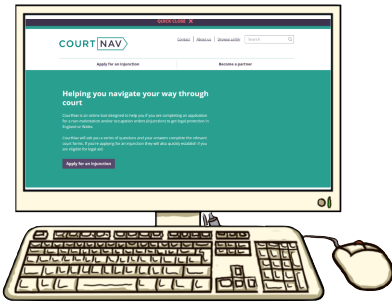
- making an application for Probate



- We wrote the National Domestic Abuse Action Plan looking at ways we can help our users.



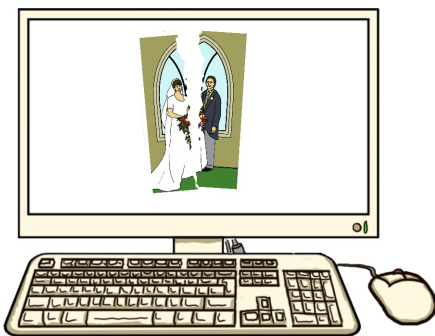
- We made changes to the form FL401. This is the form you use to ask the court to keep you safe from a person who is bothering you.



- We told people about our helpful online tool called CourtNav. This helps people using the Family courts to get legal protection if they need it.



Priority 3: making services accessible for vulnerable users.



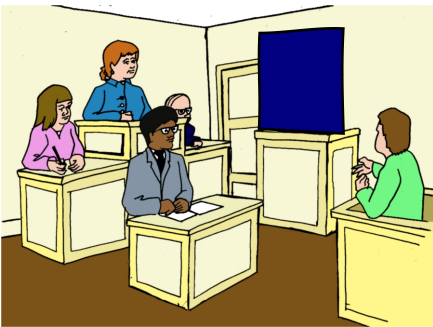
- We made the new digital divorce service better so you can use it at any stage of your divorce.



- We checked access to our courts.



- We used a British Sign Language **interpreter** in the jury deliberation room for 15 deaf jurors.



- We have put 200 screens in family courts so victims of domestic abuse do not have to see the person who abused them.

This is a **special measure** which means a vulnerable person can give the best evidence in court they can.

What we plan to do next



(We have said when we will do things in brackets)

Priority 1: giving the right support to vulnerable people using the court and tribunal services. This support includes signposting or telling them about other places to get information and help.



- We are checking that our staff training works.

We are training our staff to help users and **signpost** users to other places to get information and help.

(Ongoing)



- We will have video hearings available in more places.

(Autumn 2023)



- We are teaching staff about **safeguarding** our users.

Safeguarding is protecting vulnerable groups of people from abuse and neglect.

(Ongoing)



- We will offer a **webchat** service for people going to the Employment Tribunal.

Webchat means you talk to someone using online messaging.



We will help people to use the webchat if they are not sure how it works.

(Summer 2023)



- We are checking ways we can improve how family members work through **private law cases**.



Private law cases do not involve the local authority.

(Summer 2023)



- We are helping the Ministry of Justice test the **Specialist Sexual Violence Support** or **SSVS**.

This will make things better for adult victims of rape and serious sexual abuse in court.

(Ongoing)



Priority 2: collecting information about how what we are doing affects our vulnerable users. This information is called evidence.



- We will look at information about users with **protected characteristics** so their needs can be better supported. It is against the law to discriminate against anyone because of:



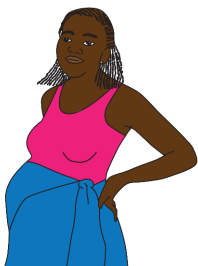
— age



— gender reassignment



— being married or in a civil partnership



— being pregnant or on maternity leave



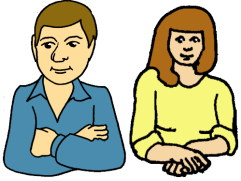
— disability



— race



— religion or belief



— sex



— sexual orientation.

These are called **protected characteristics**.

(Ongoing)



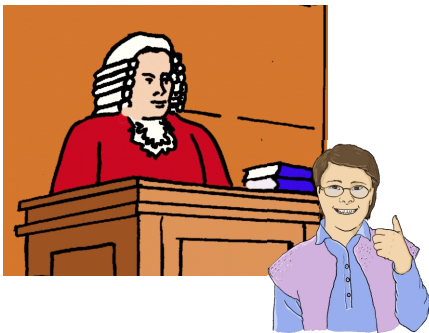
Priority 3: making services accessible for vulnerable users.

- We will bring in the **Hidden Disabilities Sunflower Scheme** in all our courts, tribunals and offices.



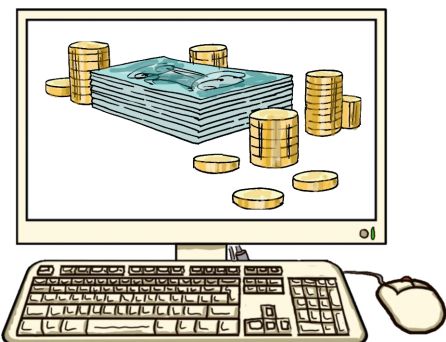
The **Hidden Disabilities Sunflower Scheme** tells people that the person wearing the sunflower symbol may need extra help.

(Summer 2023)



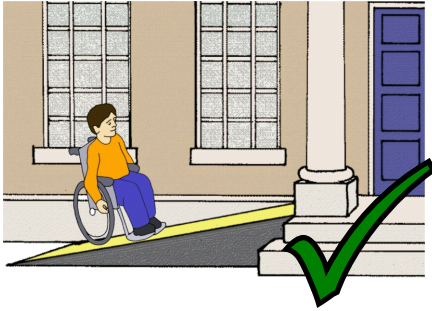
- We will keep looking for ways to make the Royal Courts of Justice more accessible and better for all users with disabilities.

(Ongoing)



- We will look at the **automated payment line** to check it is accessible to everyone.

The **automated payment line** lets you pay for fines online.



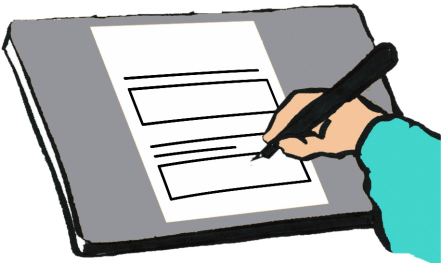
- We will keep looking for ways to make the courts more accessible and better for all users with disabilities.

(Ongoing)

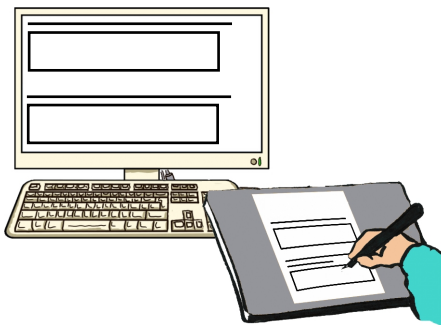


- We will check what people have told us about ways our staff can help deaf jurors.

(Ongoing)



- We will make our forms clear and easy to use.



We will make sure you can get any online forms as paper forms too.

(Ongoing)

Looking to the future



We are making courts and tribunals work better for people who use them and for people working in them. This is called **reform**.



When we make changes we will check how the changes affect vulnerable users.

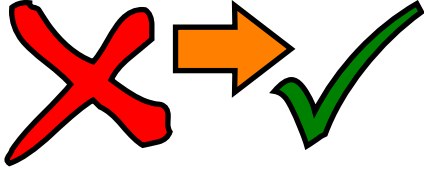


We will ask criminal court users how we are doing and then put what we find on our website.



We will keep talking with external stakeholders and partners and our **Public User Engagement Groups** to get feedback and understand issues.

Public User Engagement Groups discuss and provide advice with HMCTS staff on the work we are doing.



If we find vulnerable people are having trouble using our services, we will try to fix them and include them in our Vulnerability Action Plan.



We will continue to publish our plan on [GOV.UK](https://www.gov.uk).

What the words mean

Accessible: when something is accessible everyone can use it.

Digital support: means help using technology.

Divorce: to officially end a marriage.

Evidence: collecting information.

Hidden Disabilities Sunflower Scheme: tells people that the person wearing the sunflower may need extra help.

HMCTS: stands for His Majesty's Courts and Tribunals Service. We run courts and tribunals in England and Wales and tribunals in Scotland.

Interpreter: a person who changes what someone is saying into another language.

Making a civil money claim online: using the internet to ask a court to make a decision on money you think you are owed.

Policy: a set of rules.

Priority areas: important things we want to do.

Private law cases: do not involve the local authority.

Probate: dealing with the money and property of someone who has died.

Protected characteristics: a law about discriminating against a person because of their age, gender, marital status, being pregnant, disability, religion or belief, sex, sexual orientation.

Reform: making courts and tribunals work better for people who use them and for people working in them.

Safeguarding: means protecting vulnerable people.

Specialist Sexual Violence Support or SSVS: will make things easier in court for victims of rape and serious sexual abuse.

Signposting: telling people about other places to get information and help.

Single Justice Service: where a magistrate can quickly and fairly deal with a minor offence such as using a television without a licence.

Social Security and Child Support Tribunal: to ask for a claim to be looked at again when you think a mistake has been made, you ask a tribunal to look at it.

Special measures: changes that can be made to help someone who is vulnerable to give the best evidence in court they can.

Vulnerable: when people have a difficulty and need extra support. This could be a disability, mental health condition or an experience which has made someone feel unsafe.

Vulnerability Action Plan: How we are going to make coming to court better for vulnerable people.

Webchat: means you talk to someone using online messaging.

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