



HM Courts &
Tribunals Service



How we support vulnerable people in court and tribunals

October 2024 update



EasyRead version



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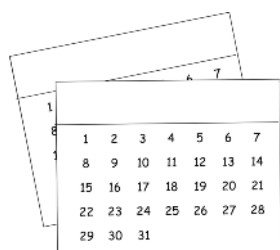
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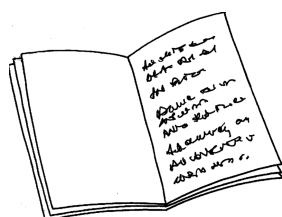
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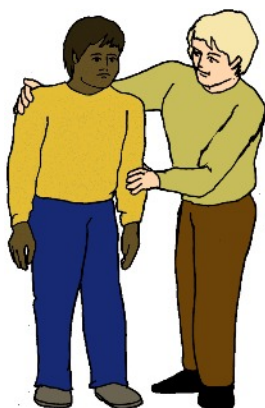


HMCTS stands for His Majesty's Courts and Tribunals Service.

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.



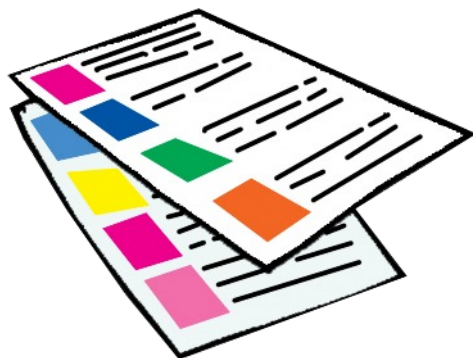
When something is **accessible** everyone can use it.



How we support vulnerable people tells you how we will make coming to courts and tribunals better for **vulnerable** people.

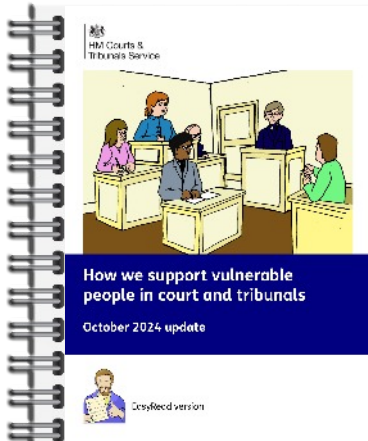


We promise to listen to **vulnerable** people and the services that help **vulnerable** people so we can give you help when you need it.



This is an easy read paper about checking up on the support we can give to **vulnerable** people and what we should be telling people about it.

What we have done to support people



We last told you about our plan in April 2024. This is our October 2024 update. We have changed the name of the update to '**How we support vulnerable people**'.



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.



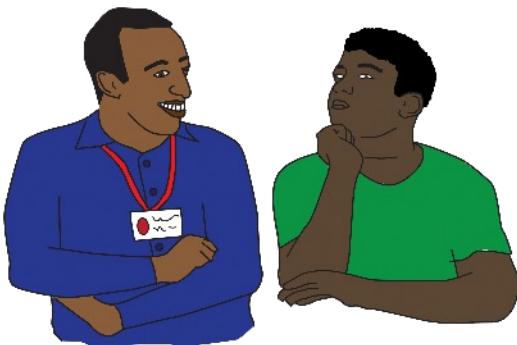
Priority 2: collecting information about how using our service affects our vulnerable people.

This information is called **evidence**.



Priority 3: making our services accessible for vulnerable people.

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



We will continue to make sure **vulnerable** people can use our services 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 the National Disability Strategy



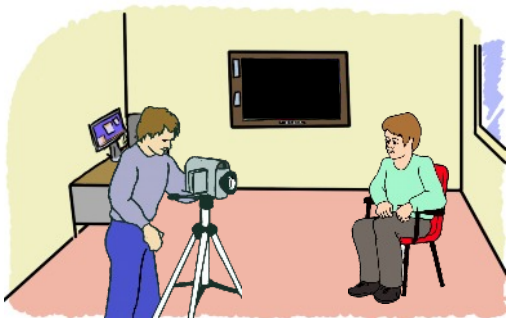
- looking at government plans such as the National Strategy for Autistic Children, Young People, and Adults, and the Ministry of Justice Neurodiversity Action Plan.

How we currently support vulnerable people to access and participate in court and tribunal services



We offer special measures

Special measures are ways we can help **vulnerable** people, such as offering a **remote link** for giving **evidence** or the use of privacy screens in court.

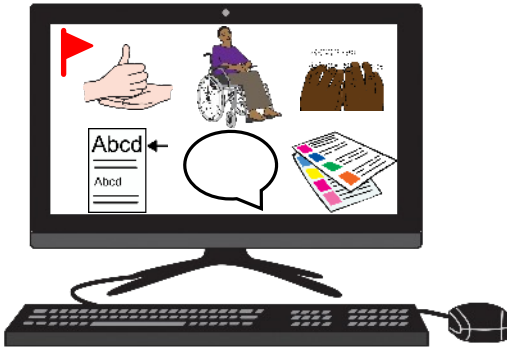


A **remote link** means giving your evidence from a safe place away from the courtroom using a video camera.



Special measures are not the same everywhere. The type of special measure will depend on the case or hearing.

We provide reasonable adjustments to make our services accessible to people with disabilities



A **Reasonable adjustment** can be having a person help you with your mobility or communication needs.



For example:

- providing our information in other formats such as audio or easy read



- helping you complete a form



- providing a chair to meet your needs.

We provide intermediary services if people need communication support at a court or tribunal hearing



Intermediaries are communication specialists who work on behalf of **HMCTS** to support people in a court or tribunal hearing.

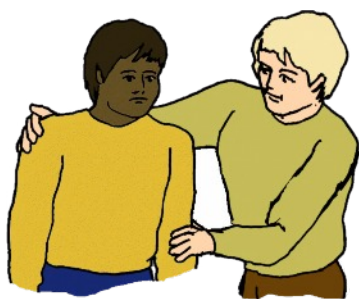
Intermediaries tell **HMCTS** about your communication needs when you are taking part in a court or tribunal hearing.

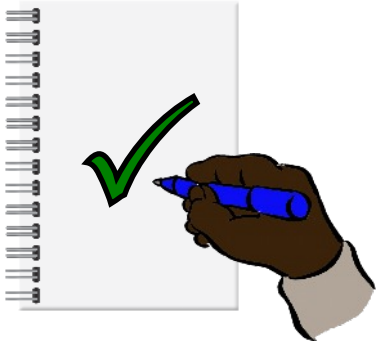
We offer remote links and can give you information about video hearings



We will:

- give you a website link
- tell you how to join the hearing
- let you know how to get support.





We do equality impact assessments

This means we check how what we do affects you.

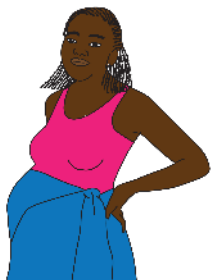


We must treat people equally.



The law says we must not **discriminate** or treat you differently because of:

- age
- gender reassignment
- being married or in a civil partnership
- being pregnant or on maternity leave
- disability

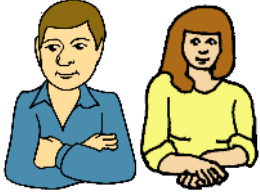




- race



- religion or belief



- sex



- sexual orientation

These are called **protected characteristics**.



We put information about coming to a court or tribunal on the internet to help you prepare for your visit to a court or tribunal

You can find this information at GOV.UK



We direct you to additional support that will help you. This is called signposting

With the right information, we can work out your needs and connect you with other places and people to get support or help.



We have joined the Hidden Disabilities Sunflower Scheme in all our courts, tribunals and offices

People can wear a lanyard with the sunflower symbol to show our staff they may need extra help or a little more time.



Some support needs to be agreed by a judge. The judge will look at the information about what support is needed and make a decision.

What we have done in our priority areas since April 2024



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.



To help us make our court and tribunals' service better, we have looked at:

- how we tell people about the support we provide
- how we ask people about the support they need including the forms we provide
- how to make it easier to ask for support.



To help us make our Civil, Family and Tribunals services better, we have:



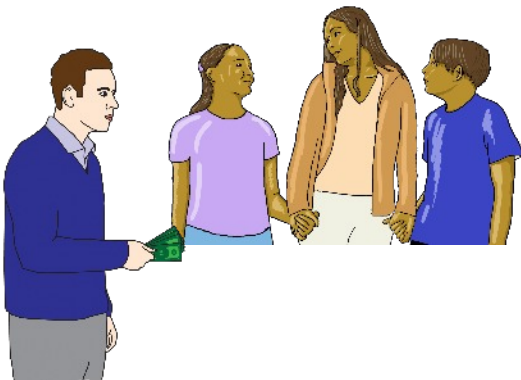
- started a **webchat** option for help with **Social Security** and **Child Support** in Scotland

Webchat means you talk to someone using **online** messaging.

Online means using the internet.



Social security means government payments to help people who are on a low income or disabled.



Child support means parents have to provide money for their child after **divorce** or separation.

Divorce means to officially end a marriage.



- continued to build our understanding of how **HMCTS** and it's security teams can help people experiencing **domestic abuse** when using our services

Domestic abuse is when your adult family member tries to hurt or control you.



- tested how we can improve Family **Private Law** applications for **litigants in person**.



Private Law cases are between family members, such as parents or other relatives and do not involve the Local Authority.



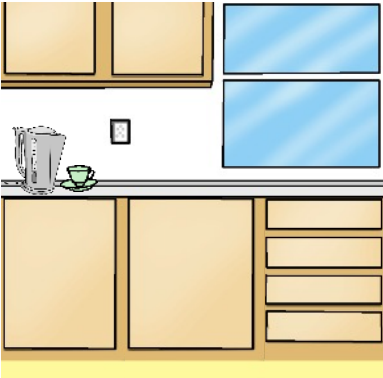
A **litigant in person** is a person or organisation who has to go to court and speaks for themselves instead of using a solicitor or barrister.

To help us make our Crime service better, we have:

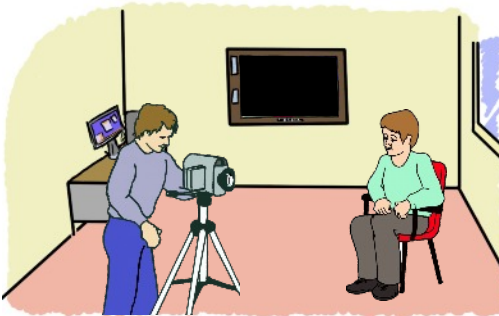
- made some witness waiting rooms in crown courts better including:



- new paint and carpets



- somewhere you can make a drink



- video link rooms

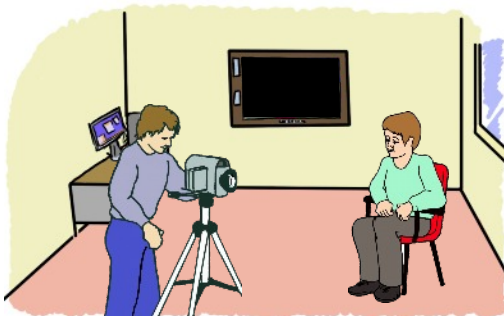
A video link room is where you can go to have a **video hearing**



Video hearings mean people can take part in a hearing across the internet if the court says it is okay.



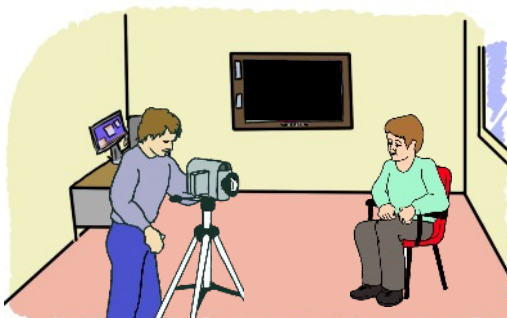
- supported courts to provide **pre-recorded cross examination** for **vulnerable** people



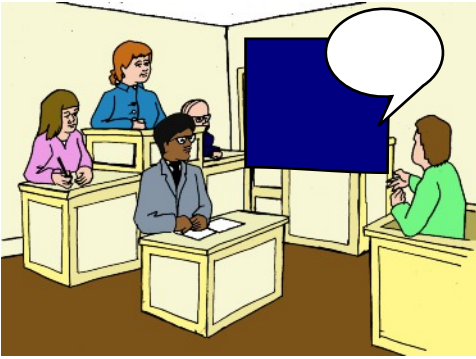
Pre-record means you answer questions outside the courtroom before the hearing and someone makes a video or sound recording to play in court.



Cross-examination means a legal representative asks you more questions to check you have been telling the truth.



- helped **remote link** sites to offer somewhere to pre-record **evidence**



- better communication and support in 3 specialised courts for victims of rape and serious sexual abuse



- started testing how counselling support is working for people sitting on jury's in difficult cases

- continued to talk to the Home Office Policy and Innovation Lab (CoLab) who have looked at the **Liaison and Diversion services**.



Liaison and Diversion services spot people who have mental disorders, a learning disability, or other vulnerabilities when they first come into the criminal justice system.

We will be working with them to bring in their ideas for improvements.



Priority 2: collecting information about how using our service affects our vulnerable people

This information is called **evidence**.



To help us make our court and tribunals' service better, we have:

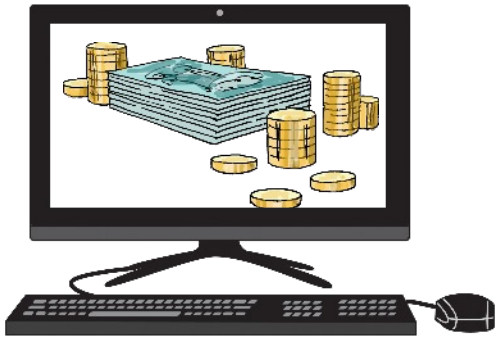
- checked what problems people applying for immigration and asylum experience



- checked what problems **vulnerable** adults have experienced when using the justice system and what would have helped



- collected information about people who are more likely to be treated unfairly because of **protected characteristics** to understand what is happening



- checked the information we are getting about people using the **automated payment line** for payments to the county court.

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



Priority 3: making our services accessible for vulnerable people



To help us make our courts and tribunals' service better, we have:

- looked at how the **Video Hearing Service** in criminal cases can be made better



- given more **vulnerable** people access to We are Group who support more people to get online



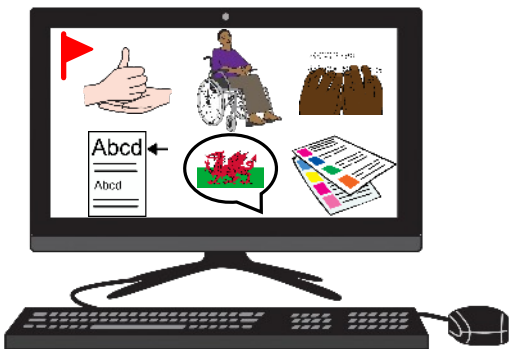
- checked how **accessible** some of our buildings are so we can make improvements.

To help us make our Civil, Family and Tribunals service better, we have:



- made making a claim to an **employment tribunal** more **accessible**.

An **employment tribunal** is for when you think you have been unfairly sacked.



- made the system better to let staff know someone has access needs



- made the **divorce** service better by giving people and their legal representatives online access to their cases



- checked the information we are getting about people using **automated payment line** for payments to the county court.

Looking to the future



We will carry on looking at the changes we make and how they affect **vulnerable** people.



We will carry on talking to people about their experiences and we will improve things that do not work for them.

What the words mean

Access to justice: is a person's right to use the courts to work through legal disputes.

Accessible: when something is accessible everyone can use it.

Automated payment line: lets you pay for fines online or by telephone.

Cross-examination: a legal representative asks you more questions to check you have been telling the truth.

Discriminate: to treat people differently because of their age, gender, marital status, being pregnant, disability, race, religion or belief, sex, sexual orientation.

Divorce: to officially end a marriage.

Domestic abuse: when your adult family member tries to hurt or control you.

Employment tribunal: when you think you have been unfairly sacked.

Evidence: collecting information.

Equality impact assessments: check how what we do affects you.

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

Intermediaries: are communication specialists who work on behalf of HMCTS to support people participating in a court or tribunal hearing. They tell HMCTS about a person's specific communication needs how to help them.

Liaison and Diversion services: spots people who have mental disorders, a learning disability, or other vulnerabilities when they first come into the criminal justice system.

Litigant in person: an individual, company or organisation who has to go to court without legal representation

Online: using the internet.

Pre-record: you answer questions outside the courtroom before the hearing and someone makes a video or sound recording to play in court.

Priority areas: important things we want to do.

Private law cases: cases that do not involve the local authority.

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

Reasonable adjustments: making our service accessible to people with disabilities. This can be having a person help you with your mobility or communication needs.

Remote link: is giving your evidence from a safe place away from the courtroom using a video camera.

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

Social security and child support: are run by the government.

Social security: means government payments to help people who are on a low income or disabled.

Child support: means parents have to provide money for their child after divorce or separation.

Special measures: are ways we can help vulnerable users, such as offering a remote link to give evidence and the use of privacy screens in court.

Video hearings: mean people can take part in a hearing across the internet if the court says it is okay.

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.

Webchat: you talk to someone using online messaging.

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