

Policy name: Secure Social Video Calling Policy Framework

Re-Issue Date: 11 August 2026

Implementation Date: 26 February 2021*

*Changes made as a result of the 11 March 2024 update will come into effect on 18 March 2024.

Replaces the following documents (e.g. PSIs, PSOs, Custodial Service Specs) which are hereby cancelled: This Policy Framework replaces the internal document: *Video Calls: Interim Policy Framework*

Introduces amendments to the following documents:

N/A

Action required by:

☐	HMPPS HQ	☒	Governors
☒	Public Sector Prisons	☐	Heads of Group
☒	Contracted Prisons	☐	Contract Managers in Probation Trusts
☐	National Probation Service	☐	HMPPS-run Immigration Removal Centres (IRCs)
☐	HMPPS Rehabilitation Contract Services Team	☒	Under 18 Young Offender Institutions
☐	Other providers of Probation and Community Services		

Mandatory Actions: All groups referenced above must adhere to the Requirements section of this Policy Framework, which contains all mandatory actions.

For Information: By the implementation date, Governors¹ of Public Sector Prisons and Contracted Prisons must ensure that any new local policies that are developed because of this Policy Framework are compliant with relevant legislation, including the Public-Sector Equality Duty (Equality Act, 2010).

Section 6 of the Policy Framework contains guidance to implement the mandatory requirements set out in section 4 of this Policy Framework. Whilst it will not be mandatory to follow what is set out in this guidance, clear reasons to depart from the guidance should be documented

¹ In this document the term Governor also applies to Directors of Contracted Prisons.

locally. Any questions concerning departure from the guidance can be sent to the contact details below.

How will this Policy Framework be audited or monitored:

All groups referenced above must adhere to the Requirements section of this Policy Framework, which contains all mandatory actions.

Mandatory elements of this Policy Framework must be subject to local management checks.

Resource Impact: Secure Social video calling is a communication provision similar to telephone calls, with some potentially increased risks to security and privacy as a result of the addition of visual element. Therefore, call monitoring in accordance with the Interception, Monitoring and Security of Prisoner Communications Policy Framework, under the powers in Prison Rule 35A/YOI Rule 11 will need to be undertaken with secure social video calling. Establishments must have a nominated local function to oversee and resource the supervision of each secure social video calling laptop whilst in use and have the potential for live viewing of visual call content throughout all secure social video call sessions on the Monitoring Terminal.

Contact:

For technical/policy related queries: videocalls@digital.justice.gov.uk

For Security related queries: NIU.ProjectsPolicy@justice.gov.uk

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Approved by OPS for publication: Sarah Coccia Chair, Operational Policy Sub-board, February 2021

Revisions

Date	Changes
15/11/2021	Updated to reflect the reduced restrictions in prisons and will remain in place until a long-term policy position on secure social video calling has been established.
20/09/2022	Updated to reflect alignment with the Authorised Communications Controls and Interception Policy Framework. Updates made to paragraphs 1.2, 4.1, 4.4, 4.9 – 4.11, 4.13, 4.22-4.32, 4.34-4.42, 4.45-4.46, and 6.1-6.2. Annex A has been removed.
11/03/2024	Updated to reflect the extension of the free video calling offer, per month per adult and child in custody, clarification concerning additional free video calls, alignments with references to the Authorised Communications Controls and Interception Policy Framework; and update made to paragraph 4.18 - Child Contact Restrictions and Persons Posing a Risk to Children (PPRC) – to align with the Public Protection Manual (PSI 18/2016).
04/11/2024	The policy has been updated to reference the new Prison Public Protection Policy Framework
11/08/2026	Updated to reference the Interception, Monitoring and Security of Prisoner Communications Policy Framework.

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1. **Purpose**

- 1.1 Secure social video calls are an additional method for adults and children to communicate and maintain ties with their family and significant others while in custody, alongside other forms of social contact.
- 1.2 This policy framework does not intend secure social video calls to be a substitute for face-to-face visits. Where face-to-face visits can safely be delivered and remain the preference, no adult or child in custody should be asked to substitute that for a video call. Providing access to secure social video calls for adults and children in custody as a supplement to existing communications through letters, phone calls and social visits helps to maintain and strengthen family ties and is a key recommendation of the [2017](#) and [2019](#) Lord Farmer Reviews and as such its use encouraged.
- 1.3 There are however security risks associated with all adult and children in custody communications and there may be circumstances where it is necessary and proportionate to place restrictions or conditions on secure social video calls. As per the direction of the Secretary of State laid out in the Interception, Monitoring and Security of Prisoner Communications Policy Framework, all secure social video calls will be intercepted and recorded. These frameworks provide Governors' direction on these policy areas and sets out how they should make decisions in a lawful manner.

2. **Evidence**

- 2.1 There is a body of evidence that family contact brings benefits for people in prison – for their immediate wellbeing and for longer term rehabilitative outcomes too although this evidence rests largely on contact via face-to-face visits, letters and phone calls. There is evidence too of the benefits of regular contact for family members who are able to stay well connected with their families and significant others in prison. The impacts on prisoners and families of the secure social video calls contact are emerging and there is still much to learn. US research suggests that secure social video calls can play a part in reducing re-offending, and although it is too soon to test this in England and Wales there is some tentative evidence that the rollout of video technology for family contact is beneficial. The evidence of positive impact of in-cell telephones is emerging.
- 2.2 Research indicates that while face-to-face contact may be preferred, the use of technology in addition to physical visits to support but not replace family contact may have the following advantages:
 - a) Offers greater convenience, immediacy, and flexibility.
 - b) Overcomes difficulties some have using other means of contact with people in prison (e.g., travel costs (particularly for those imprisoned far away, such as foreign nationals), literacy required for writing, mobility to travel to the site, or finding noisy or crowded environments difficult, etc.).
 - c) Reduces some of the potential harms of imprisonment associated with lack of access to digital technology.

3. **Outcomes**

- 3.1 Where secure social video calling is in place in prisons, adults and children can communicate and maintain ties with family and other significant people in a manner which does not compromise safety for any participant of the secure social video call. Local processes in providing secure social video calls to adults and children in custody meets the minimum requirements as set out in this policy, the Interception, Monitoring and Security of Prisoner Communications Policy Framework and ensures the maintenance of security, good order and public protection in line with existing policies.
- 3.2 Intended outcomes for the service:
- a) Adults and children can maintain contact and see family and significant others during this period in custody thus maintaining their relationships.
 - b) Adults and children in custody are able to hold secure social video calls with their families and friends subject to availability and the responsibilities outlined in this policy.
 - c) Providing a suitable environment for adults and children in custody to participate in secure social video calls, where possible.
 - d) Secure social video calling does not introduce any unacceptable increase in risk to the security of adults and children in custody, staff, and the public.

4. **Requirements**

Access to secure social video calls

- 4.1 There is no express statutory right for adults and children in custody to have secure social video calls. To ensure a fair provision of secure social video calls, establishments have access to sufficient credit for each adult and child in custody, including those held in under 18 YOIs. This credit permits access to up to 60-minutes of secure social video calling per month at public expense. The offer of either one single video call of up to 60-minutes or two secure social video calls of up to 30 minutes each will be at the governor's discretion in line with local capacity.
- 4.2 Access to secure social video calls for adults and children in custody is determined by the operational, safety, and security needs of each establishment, as well as the number and times of available call slots. However, establishments should take account of when families and other significant people especially children in the community are available for calls. As such, where possible consideration should be given to offering secure social video calling in the evenings and at weekends. The provision level may vary, at times, between establishments based on the impact of any restrictions on the prison regime, including staffing.
- 4.3 Additional free, to adults and children in custody, secure social video calls may be offered in exceptional circumstances at the governor's discretion, where necessary for wellbeing reasons e.g. where conducive to the wellbeing of the individual or their immediate family or in exceptional circumstances e.g. where a family member cannot visit for health reasons. Any decisions about the allocation of extra secure social video calls must be made without bias or discrimination. Children held in the Youth Custody Service (YCS) estate will continue to have access to

additional secure social video calls as and when needed. Governors must satisfy themselves that there is capacity for all to have at least one secure social video call as set out in paragraph 4.1 before additional calls are offered and that a fair and consistent approach is adapted to any additional secure social video call offer.

- 4.4 Governors may withhold or impose limitations on access by adults and children in custody where, based on an assessment of risk, it is necessary and proportionate to do so, under one of the grounds in Prison Rule 34 (YOI Rule 9) and where it is non-discriminatory to do so. Governors must document instances where they have restricted access to secure social video calls for certain adults and children in custody, and their rationale for doing so under Prison Rule 34 (YOI Rule 9). See the Interception, Monitoring and Security of Prisoner Communications Policy Framework for further policy and guidance on communication restrictions.
- 4.5 Support must be made available for those with cognitive and learning disabilities and the secure social video calling area/room made accessible for those with physical disabilities, including hearing and visual impairments. Support must also be available for those who may require technical support.

Facilitating secure social video calls

- 4.6 Requests for secure social video calls can be initiated by the adult or child in custody or by family members and other significant people, depending on the model the prison has chosen.
- 4.7 It is essential that there are sufficient staffing levels to review requests and schedule secure social video calls. Each establishment must also allow any necessary regime changes for adults and children in custody to be able to participate in secure social video calls at allocated times and ensure there is sufficient provision of staff to supervise and monitor secure social video calls - see the Interception, Monitoring and Security of Prisoner Communications Policy Framework for further guidance concerning monitoring provisions.

Rescheduling/call cancellations/failure to attend

- 4.8 Where scheduled secure social video calls do not take place, the circumstances of the secure social video call cancellation or possible failure to attend must be locally reviewed, and consideration must be given to rebook. Where possible, establishments should give families sufficient notice to arrange a secure social video call.

Communications compact

- 4.9 Establishments must ensure that adults and children in custody wishing to access secure social video calling have had the Communications Compact explained to them, given to them to read, and signed before a secure social video call can be permitted. Policy and guidance can be found under 'Communications Compact' of the Interception, Monitoring and Security of Prisoner Communications Policy Framework. Establishments should also ensure that requests to access secure social video calling are considered alongside the eligibility risk assessment matrix contained within the Heads of Security Video Calling Guidance.

- 4.10 Governors may consider temporarily banning or barring an adult or child in custody from contacting a specific individual via secure social video calling, if appropriate in accordance with Prison Rule 34(YOI Rule 9) for example, if there are repeated security breaches, and refer the adult or child in custody back to the Communications Compact. The situation should be reviewed regularly.
- 4.11 Policy and guidance on refusal to sign the communication compact is covered in the Interception, Monitoring and Security of Prisoner Communications Policy Framework

Secure social video calling contacts

- 4.12 Adults and children in custody can receive secure social video calls from those already added to their list of phone contacts or approved list for social visits. Any requests for secure social video calls to any banned visitor must only be authorised by the responsible operational manager for secure social video calling.
- 4.13 In general a maximum of four call recipients should be permitted during any single call made by an adult or child in custody. However, consideration should be given to accommodating large families with more than three children in the community.
- 4.14 Children under the age of 18 may join secure social video calls as an additional participant when calling from outside prison, but they may not be the main or only caller.

Secure social video calling contact terms and conditions

- 4.15 To enable access to secure social video calls, the users need to accept the provider's terms and conditions.

Child Contact Restrictions and Persons Posing a Risk to Children (PPRC)

- 4.16 The [Prison Public Protection Policy Framework](#) sets out the policy and guidance for staff involved with facilitating secure social video calls and includes identifying children approved for a secure social video call with an adult or child in custody assessed as a PPRC.

Safety and wellbeing

- 4.17 Although secure social video calls are expected to be a positive experience that support ties with families and other significant people, sometimes calls can cause distress to the adult or child in custody. This may be because they are receiving bad news (such as the breakdown of a relationship), they may be seeing people linked with past trauma, or for some people just seeing loved ones or their home whilst being separated can be difficult.
- 4.18 A support system must be in place that involves staff looking out for signs that an adult or child in custody has been negatively impacted by a secure social video call and identify whether they may need additional support (which could involve opening an ACCT, see further guidance in PSI 64/2011 – Management of prisoners at risk of harm to self, to others and from others).

- 4.19 The safer custody hotline for the relevant establishment should be publicised to families and other significant people so that they know where they can raise any safety and/or wellbeing concerns they may have. Details of all these numbers is available on GOV.UK.

Data Processing

- 4.20 The processing of personal data under this policy framework must be done in accordance with the Data Protection Act 2018 and, where relevant, the General Data Protection Regulation.

Management of security of secure social video calls

Monitoring

- 4.21 All live secure social video calls will be observed by a member of staff via a monitoring terminal which must be active throughout to allow secure social video calls to be made. Only visual content (not audio) will be viewed to ensure that technical stability of the secure social video call is maintained, and to make cursory checks to ensure that all rules relating to secure social video calling are adhered to by both the adult or child in custody and recipient(s) of the secure social video call. This is necessary for the prevention of crime and the maintenance of prison security as well as checking for obvious signs of distress by any party to the secure social video call. For further policy guidance on the monitoring of secure social video calling see section 'Monitoring and Interception Protocol' of the Interception, Monitoring and Security of Prisoner Communications Policy Framework
- 4.22 The security settings must be set as per the latest security guidance in the Interception and Restrictions of Communications Operations Manual (restricted document). An operational, or operational support, member of staff must supervise adults and children in custody whilst the secure social video calling laptop is in use. All E-List Annex A assessments must include the monitoring of secure social video calls in line with pin phone requirements, as per PSI 10/2015 – Management and Security of Escape List (E-list) Prisoners.

Security Management and Storage of all Secure Social Video Calling Equipment

- 4.23 The monitoring terminal must be stored in a secure room with restricted access, with either unique suite key or code locking access. Access to this area must be restricted to staff who have authorisation to access prison pin phone terminals only whilst live/retrospective monitoring is taking place.

Designated Area for secure social Video Calls

- 4.24 All establishments must ensure the room or area used for secure social video calling is accessible for those with disabilities or alternative arrangements made to enable them to make secure social video calls. Further details on the requirements for the designated area can be found in the Heads of Security Video Calling Guidance.

For further policy requirements and guidance on the management of security of secure social video calling see Interception, Monitoring and Security of Prisoner Communications Policy Framework which covers the following:

- Legal requirements for managing security of secure social video calls and guidance on Monitoring and Interception Protocol;
- Pausing or terminating secure social video calls;
- E-List Heightened, High-Risk Category A and Exceptional Risk Category A Prisoners; Terrorist and Terrorist Risk Offenders; Terrorist and Terrorist-Connected prisoners and;
- Retention / Disclosure / Dissemination.

5. Constraints

5.1 Access to secure social video calls in a non-social capacity such as official video calls, including for rehabilitative purposes, are not covered by this policy framework.

6. Guidance

Further technical and equipment related guidance

6.1 This is available on request at: videocalls@digital.justice.gov.uk

Training

6.2 Training material can be made available on request at: videocalls@digital.justice.gov.uk or tailored sessions can be arranged on a site-by-site basis.