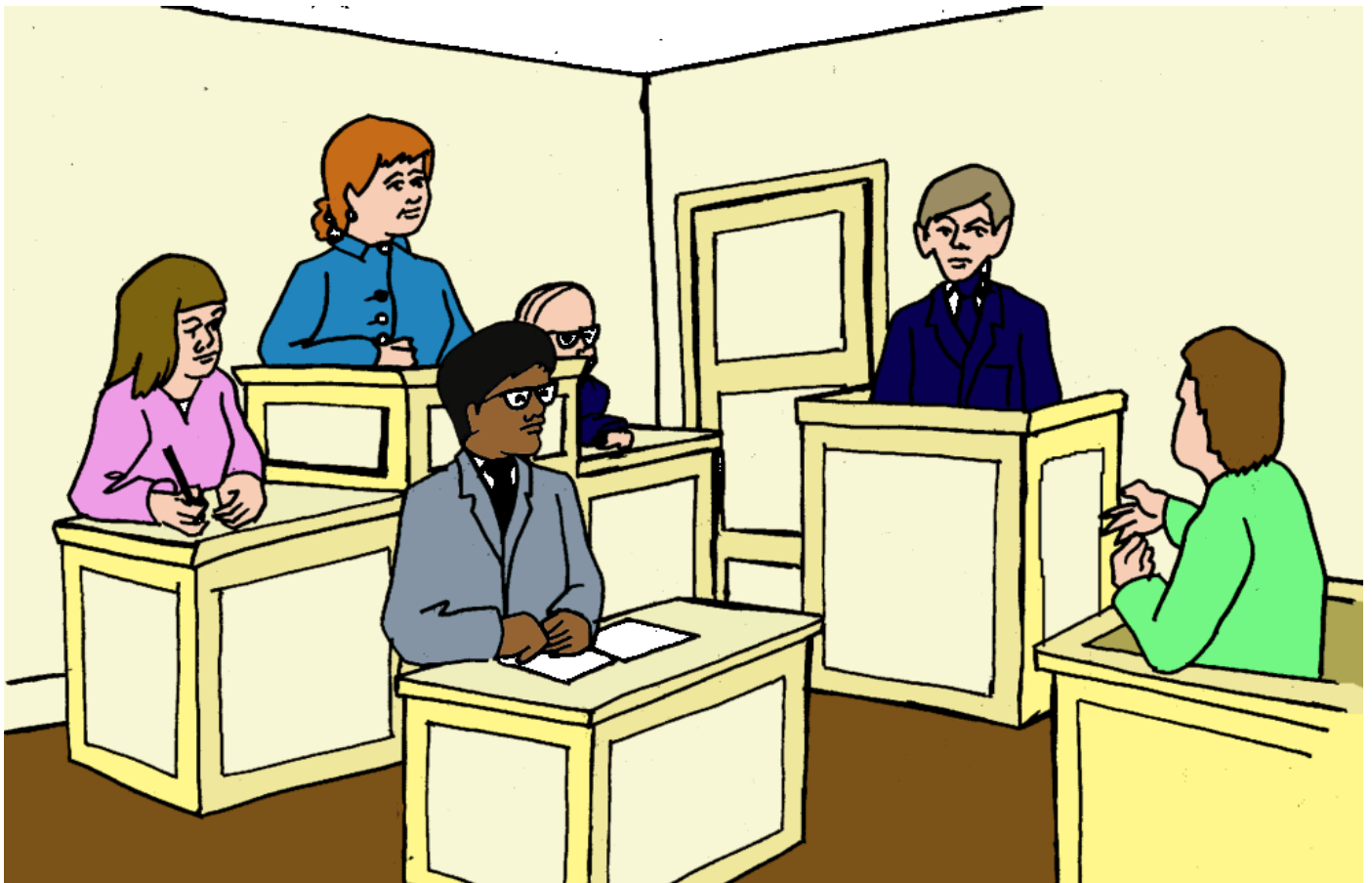




HM Courts &  
Tribunals Service



# Vulnerability Action Plan

## April 2022 update

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



EasyRead version



HM Courts &  
Tribunals Service

About HMCTS

1



Our priority areas

4



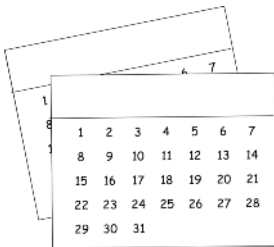
What we have already done in  
our three priority areas

5



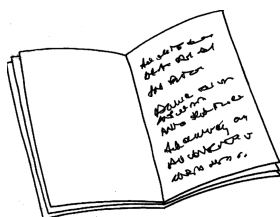
What we plan to do next

11



Looking to the future

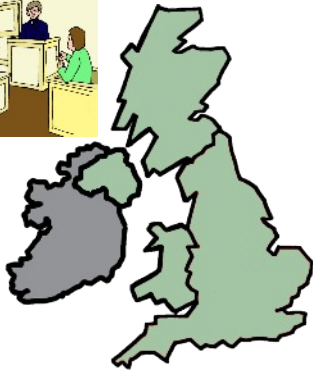
21



What the words mean

23

# About HMCTS



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

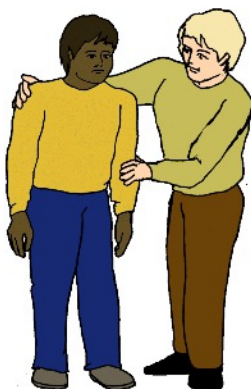
We run courts in England and Wales and tribunals in England, Wales, Scotland and Northern Ireland to give people and businesses access to justice.



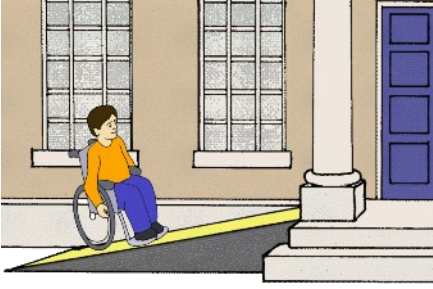
This is our **Vulnerability Action Plan**. It tells you how we will make coming to courts and tribunals better for vulnerable people.



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



We say that 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.

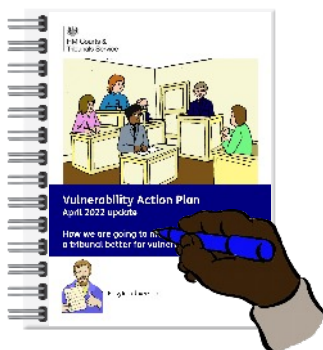


When something is **accessible** everyone can use it.

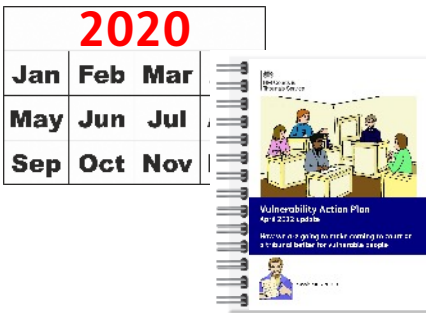
To work out how to make courts feel accessible and safer we talked to:



- vulnerable people
- services that help vulnerable people
- other government departments.



Then we wrote the Vulnerability Action Plan.



We started our plan in 2020 during COVID-19.



We looked at the plan again in October 2021.

We want to 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 new government plans such as the national disability strategy.

# Our priority areas



There are three important things we want to 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 the changes affect 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



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

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

April 2022						
Mon	Tue	Wed	Thu	Fri	Sat	Sun
				1	2	3
4	5	6	7	8	9	10



- In April 2022 we started a new service called the **Appointed Intermediary Service** in April 2022.

An **intermediary** is a person who helps people with communication needs when they take part in court and tribunal proceedings.

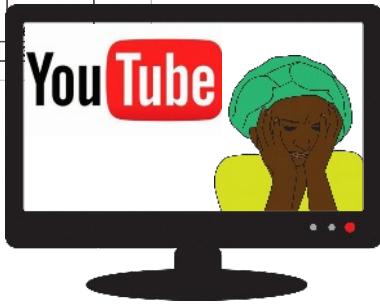
May 2022						
Mon	Tue	Wed	Thu	Fri	Sat	Sun
30	31					1
2	3	4	5	6	7	8
9	10	11	12	13	14	15
16	17	18	19	20	21	22
23	24	25	26	27	28	29



- In May 2022 we started a service that helps vulnerable people to use digital technology like computers and video links. Video links let you take part in a court hearing from another place like your home.

We Are Digital is the name of the service provider.

February 2022						
Mon	Tue	Wed	Thu	Fri	Sat	Sun
	1	2	3	4	5	6
7	8					
14	15					
21	22					
28						



- In February 2022 we made a YouTube cartoon for people who feel they need emotional support after sitting on a jury.



- We trained our staff to know how to put **reasonable adjustments** in place to help jurors, victims and witnesses.

**Reasonable adjustments** means making our service accessible to people with disabilities.



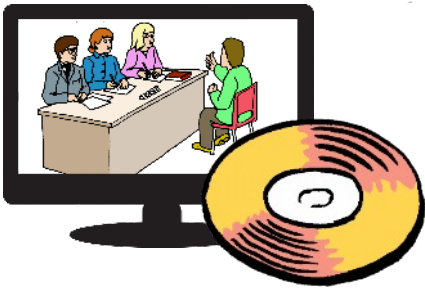
This can be having a person help you with moving around our buildings or speaking with others.



We tested a simpler Employment Tribunals claim form. The form asks users if they can take part in a **remote hearing** so the judge can decide on the right type of hearing for the parties.

**Remote hearings** are when you take part in a court hearing from another place like your home using a video link.





- We made it easier for people to get digital recordings of their Social Security and Child Support hearings in a format that suits them.



**Priority 2: collecting information about how the changes affect our vulnerable users. This information is called evidence.**



- We looked at and shared how to make **remote hearings** work better for vulnerable people.

We will:



- give vulnerable users more help to attend a remote hearing



- train staff in using **interpreters** and **intermediaries**.



- We checked what worked in our enforcement team training about helping vulnerable people. We will use this for more HMCTS staff training.



### Priority 3: making services accessible for vulnerable users.



- We trained our staff to think about being fair to vulnerable users when they make changes to our services.



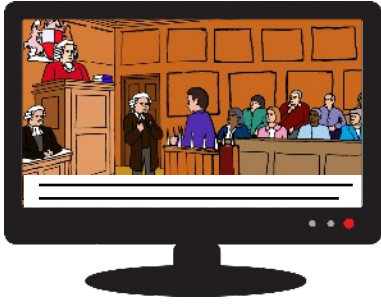
- We published a guide to help people practise using the video system before their remote hearing.



- We made some films about the justice system and what happens in courts.



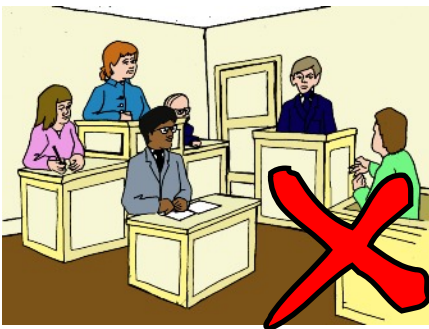
The films will help people take part in remote hearings.



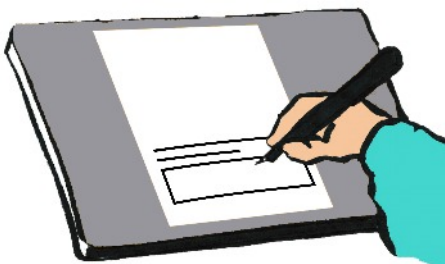
The films are in six languages with subtitles and a British Sign Language version.



We gave vulnerable victims and witnesses the chance to pre-record their evidence at all Crown Courts.



Victims or witnesses can give evidence before a trial so they do not have to be in court on the hearing day.



- We made the Family Law Act application form simpler.



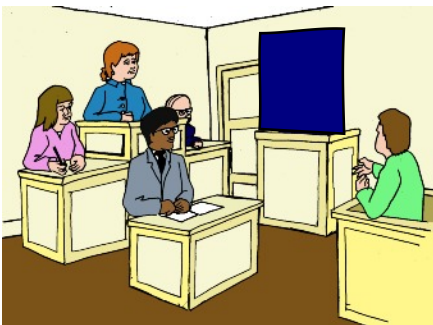
- We made an example witness statement for applicants. The form tells you why it's important to keep information safe.



- Many people had trouble with the form to apply for a divorce. We simplified the instruction and made the divorce application easier and will tell you how to get help with the form.



- We now have remote hearings to make it easier for parents to attend Special Educational Needs (SEN) tribunals.



- We put up 200 screens in our Family Courts so victims of domestic abuse do not have to see the other person during the court hearing.



- We have a freephone number for parties joining Social Security and Child Support (SSCS) hearings by telephone.

# 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 bringing in some new rules and staff training about **safeguarding**.

**Safeguarding** means protecting and we want our staff to know how to protect vulnerable people.

(We will do this all through 2022)



- We will try the **Hidden Disabilities Sunflower Scheme** in some courts.

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

(Spring, Summer 2022)





- We will link people with other services using **signposting**.

**Signposting** helps you know where to go for more help.



We will teach our staff how to use signposting in our public information leaflets and on **GOV.UK**.

(During 2022)



- We will set up our hearing centres so that staff helping the public will be able to spot and help users with extra support needs.

This helps:

- give clear information
- signpost to other sources





- provide **digital assistance** to users during hearings.

**Digital assistance** means help using the internet or technology.

(Ongoing)



- We will teach our staff how to support scared and vulnerable witnesses who pre-record their evidence before a trial.

(Ongoing)



- We will help the NHS provide health care services in **remand** suites at court locations.

**Remand** means a person accused of a crime is waiting for their trial to begin or for the court to make a decision.

(Ongoing)



- We will help Employment Tribunals improve how they deal with reasonable adjustment requests.

(Spring to Summer 2022)



- We will make applying for **probate** easier.

**Probate** is about what happens to the money and belongings of a person who has died. (Summer to Autumn 2022)



**Priority 2: collecting information about how the changes affect 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)



- We will look at the type of help people need when filling out HMCTS forms.



We can use that information to help us work out better ways to help vulnerable people.

(Ongoing)



- Our staff will check that any new services look after everyone's needs and rights. This is called our **Public Sector Equality Duty**.

(Ongoing)



- We will check how remote hearings affect certain vulnerable groups.

(Ongoing)





- We will look at information about jury members with **protected characteristics** to make improvements.



It is against the law to discriminate against anyone because of a protected characteristic.

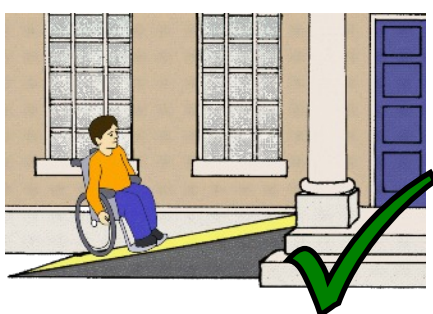
(Ongoing)



- We will go back to longer hours in our Courts and Tribunals Service Centres from February to August 2022 for Divorce and Probate services.

(Spring to Autumn 2022)

### **Priority 3: making services accessible for vulnerable users.**



- We will find ways to remove barriers that prevent access to justice.



We will help services meet online accessibility standards.

(Ongoing)



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

(Throughout 2022)

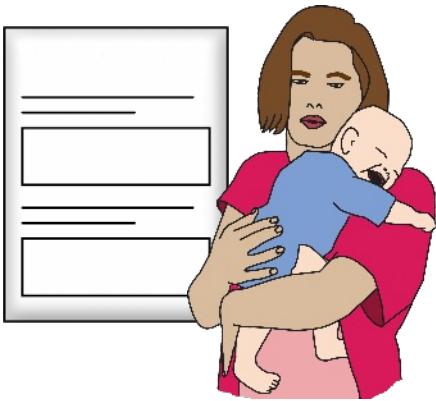


- We will help our staff to support British Sign Language interpreters being in the room where the jury talks about the case and makes decisions.

(Spring, Summer 2022)



- We will simplify the adoption service to make everything clearer and quicker.



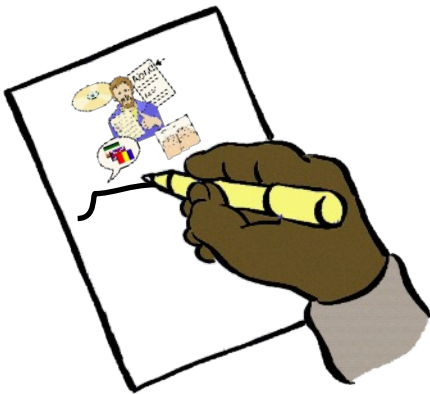
We will improve the **signposting** of support for birth parents to make applications.

(Through 2022)



- We will start remote hearings for people who want to appeal Social Security and Child Support decisions.

(Spring to Summer 2022)



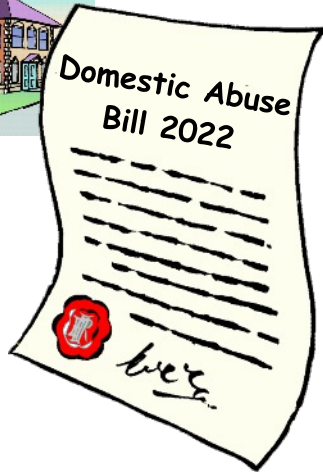
- We will record the support needs of vulnerable users so we can make sure they have the reasonable adjustments when needed.

(Spring to Summer 2022)



- We will give people appealing their decision through Immigration and Asylum tribunals the same treatment as people who have legal representation.

(Spring to Summer 2022)



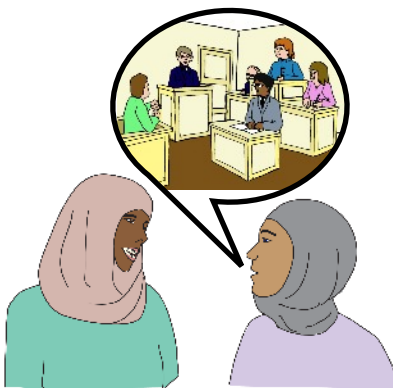
- We will bring in the Domestic Abuse Bill 2022 changes about special measures in the county court and not allowing cross-examination in civil hearings.

(Summer to Autumn 2022)

# Looking to the future



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



We will try to understand the experience of victims, witnesses and defendants in criminal courts.

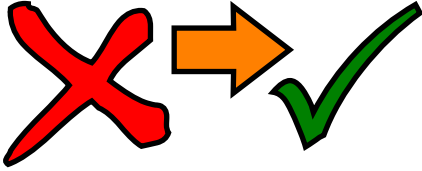


We will especially look at vulnerable people and people from ethnic minority backgrounds.



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





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.**

# What the words mean

**Accessible:** when something is accessible everyone can use it.

**Digital assistance:** means help using technology.

**Evidence:** collecting information.

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

**HMCTS:** stands for Her 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.

**Intermediary:** someone who helps people with communication needs to take part in court and tribunal proceedings.

**Priority areas:** important things we want to do.

**Probate:** is about what happens to the money and belongings of a person who has died.

**Public Sector Equality Duty:** makes sure that any new services or changes we make are fair for everyone.

**Reasonable adjustments:** means making our service accessible to people with disabilities.

**Remand:** means a person accused of a crime is waiting for their trial to begin or for the court to make a decision.

**Remote hearings:** are when you take part in a court hearing from another place like your home using a video link.

**Safeguarding:** means protecting vulnerable people.

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

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

**Vulnerability Action Plan:** how we are going to make coming to court or a tribunal better for vulnerable people.

# Credits



This paper has been designed and produced by the EasyRead service at Inspired Services Publishing Ltd.

Ref ISL155 22. July 2022.

[www.inspiredservices.org.uk](http://www.inspiredservices.org.uk)



It meets the European EasyRead Standard.



Artwork includes material from the Inspired EasyRead Collection and cannot be used anywhere else without written permission from Inspired Services.

[www.inspired.pics](http://www.inspired.pics)