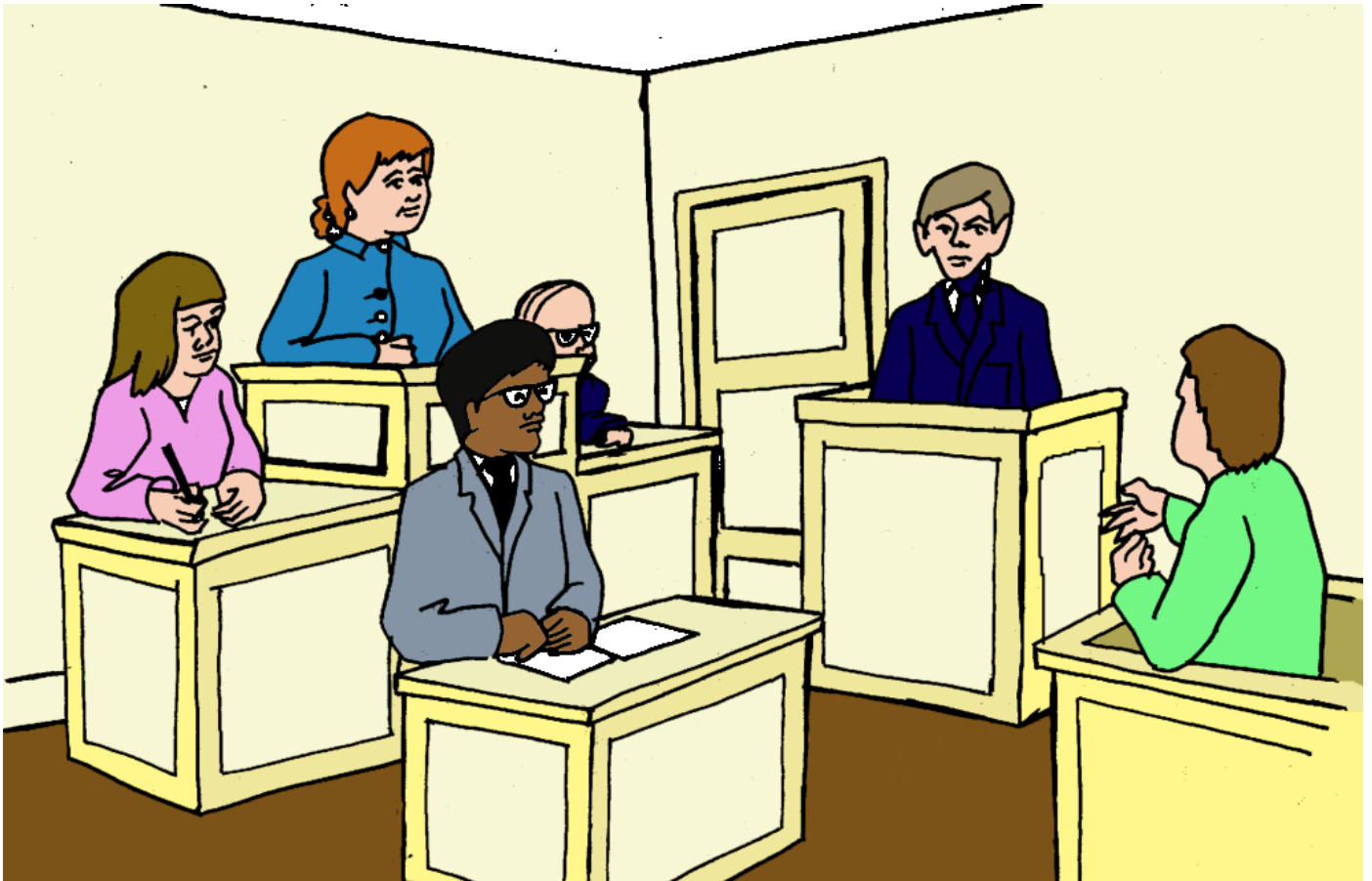




HM Courts &
Tribunals Service



Vulnerability Action Plan

October 2022 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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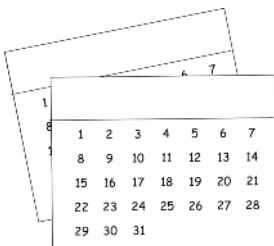
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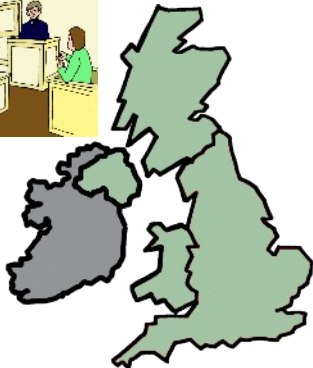
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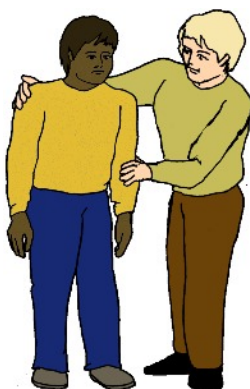


HMCTS stands for His Majesty's Courts and Tribunals Service.

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.

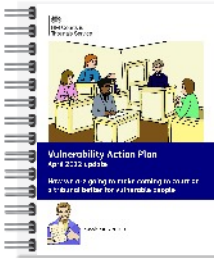


Our **Vulnerability Action Plan** tells you how we will make coming to courts and tribunals better for vulnerable people.



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

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



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

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.

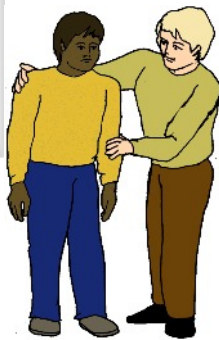
When something is accessible everyone can use it.

What we have already done in our three priority areas



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 introduced a new HMCTS **policy** about **safeguarding**.

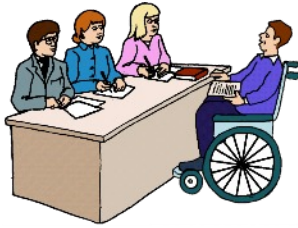
A **policy** is a set of rules.

Safeguarding is protecting the rights of adults at risk and children so they can live in safety, free from abuse and neglect.



- We wrote a guide about the new safeguarding policy. Our staff will use the guide to understand how to keep vulnerable people safe.

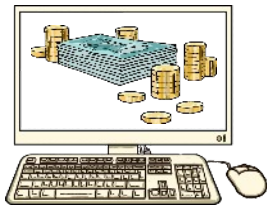
- We set up a digital support service to help vulnerable people with online court and tribunal matters such as:



- **Social Security and Child Support Tribunal**



- **Single Justice Service**



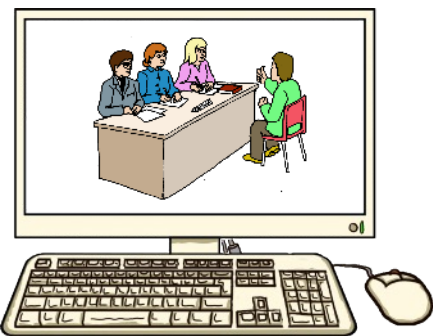
- **making a civil money claim online**



- **probate**



- **divorce.**



- We made it easier to start an Employment Tribunal case online. Our new claim form is easier to use.



- The court can now appoint a legal helper to ask questions for you in the family court.



- When you owe money you can ask for advice through the Debt Respite Scheme. This is also called Breathing Space. This means you have extra time to pay the money.



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



- We checked how people access our services to see where we can make improvements.



- When we make changes, we have checked how the changes will affect vulnerable users.



- We learned that our **Hidden Disabilities Sunflower Scheme** tested in some courts was working.

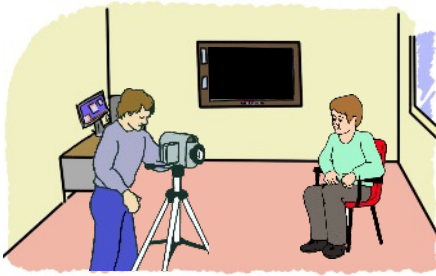
The **Hidden Disabilities Sunflower Scheme** tells people that the person wearing the sunflower symbol may need extra help.



Priority 3: making services accessible for vulnerable users.



- We used a British Sign Language **interpreter** for a deaf juror. It worked well and will allow more deaf people to take part in a jury.



- When victims have a hearing about sexual abuse or modern slavery we let them pre-record the cross-examination.



- We showed court staff how they could help users with **special measures**.

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



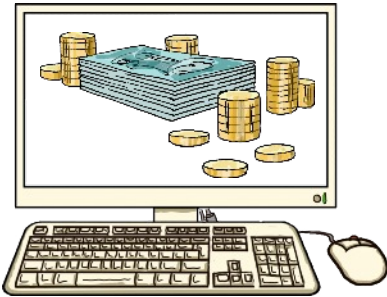
- You can now use a digital service for the new divorce law.



- All Special Educational Needs (SEN) tribunals will be held by video unless a judge wants people to come into the court.



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



- You can pay fees online through the Automated Payment Line or in the usual ways.

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 training our staff how to **signpost** or tell people about other places to get information and help.

(Ongoing)



- We are bringing in the **Hidden Disabilities Sunflower Scheme** in all courts.

(Summer 2023)



- We are teaching our staff how to support people who they think may be at risk of harm or suicide.

(Spring 2023)



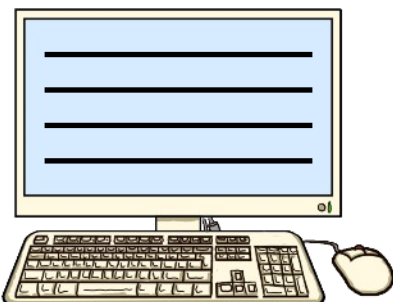
- We are checking if the Unwanted Prisoner Contact Service works. It is a service that helps people who have been affected by a crime.

(Ongoing)

- We are making it easier for family court users to make changes and see information about their case online such as:



- new contact details
- reply to orders
- look at other documents that have been added
- be signposted or directed to useful information
- track where the case is up to.

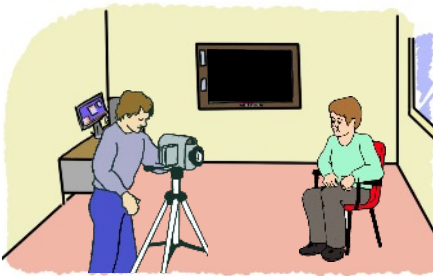


(Ongoing)



- We are planning counselling for people sitting on a jury in the criminal court if they need emotional support.

(Summer 2023)



- We are making it clear how we will allow vulnerable people to pre-record their evidence before a hearing.

(Ongoing)



- We are delivering NHS health care to people:

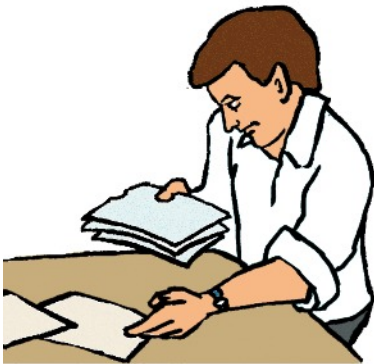
- on **remand**

- taking part in a programme where they are giving back to the community or trying to stay away from crime.

(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



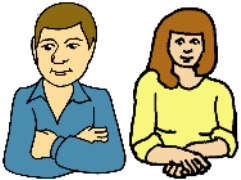
— disability



— race



— religion or belief



— sex



— sexual orientation.

These are called **protected characteristics**.

(Ongoing)



- We will check how we can help victims of domestic abuse and still make the court process fair for everyone.

(Ongoing)

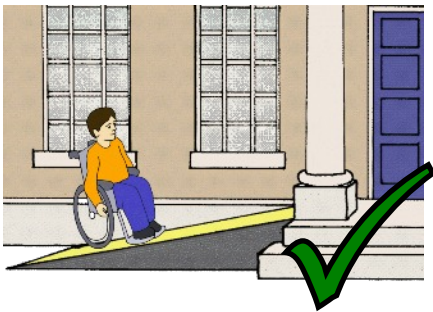


Priority 3: making services accessible for vulnerable users.



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

(Summer 2023)



- We will make our buildings more accessible.

(Ongoing)



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

(Summer 2023)



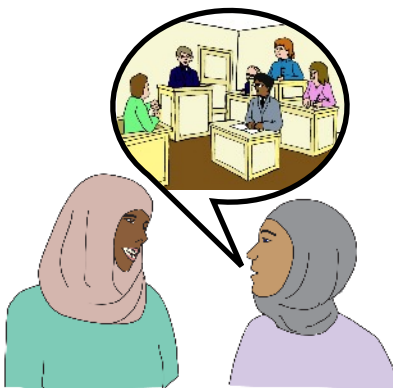
- We will make our forms better so people can tell us about being vulnerable or needing **special measures** in court. This is part of not allowing cross-examination in civil proceedings.

(Autumn 2022)

Looking to the future



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



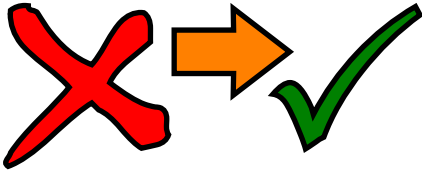
We will try to understand the experience of victims, witnesses and defendants in criminal courts.



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](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.

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.

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

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

Safeguarding: means protecting vulnerable people.

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.

Credits



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